Nicholas J. O'Reilly.

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THERE SHE STANDS AT THE SPRING, DIPPING UP WATER FOR TC-MORROW —*Page* 89.

OUR VILLAGE:

COUNTRY PICTURES.

BY

MISS MITFORD.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.

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I.

Our Village.

COUNTRY PICTURES.

OF all situations for a constant residence, that which appears to me most delightful is a little village far in the country; a small neighbourhood, not of fine mansions finely peopled, but of cottages and cottage-like houses, "messuages or tenements," as a friend of mine calls such ignoble and nondescript dwellings, with inhabitants whose faces are as familiar to us as the flowers in our garden; a little world of our own, close-packed and insulated like ants in an ant-hill, or bees in a hive, or sheep in a fold, or nuns in a convent, or sailors in a ship; where we know every one, are known to every one, interested in every one, and authorised to hope that every one feels an interest in us. How pleasant it is to slide into these true-hearted feelings from the kindly and unconscious influence of habit, and to learn to know and to love

the people about us, with all their peculiarities, just as we learn to know and to love the nooks and turns of the shady lanes and sunny commons that we pass every day. Even in books I like a confined locality, and so do the critics when they talk of the unities. Nothing is so tiresome as to be whirled half over Europe at the chariot-wheels of a hero, to go to sleep at Vienna, and awaken at Madrid; it produces a real fatigue, a weariness of spirit. On the other hand, nothing is so delightful as to sit down in a country village in one of Miss Austen's delicious novels, quite sure before we leave it to become intimate with every spot and every person it contains; or to ramble with Mr. White* over his own parish of Selborne, and form a friendship with the fields and coppices, as well as with the birds, mice, and squirrels, who inhabit them; or to sail with Robinson Crusoe to his island, and live there with him and his goats and his man Friday—how much we dread any new comers, any fresh importation of savage or sailor! we never sympathise for a moment in our hero's want of company, and are quite grieved when he gets away; or to be shipwrecked with Ferdinand on that other lovelier island—the island of Prospero, and Miranda, and Caliban, and Ariel, and nobody else, none of Dryden's exotic inventions—that is best of all. And a small neighbourhood is as good in sober waking reality as in poetry or prose; a village neighbourhood, such as this Berkshire hamlet in which I write, a long, straggling, winding street at

* White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne;* one of the most fascinating books ever written. I wonder that no naturalist has adopted the same plan.

the bottom of a fine eminence, with a road through it, always abounding in carts, horsemen, and carriages, and lately enlivened by a stage-coach from B—— to S——, which passed through about ten days ago, and will, I suppose, return some time or other. There are coaches of all varieties now-a-days; perhaps this may be intended for a monthly diligence, or a fortnight fly. Will you walk with me through our village, courteous reader? The journey is not long. We will begin at the lower end, and proceed up the hill.

The tidy, square, red cottage on the right hand, with the long well-stocked garden by the side of the road, belongs to a retired publican from a neighbouring town; a substantial person with a comely wife; one who piques himself on independence and idleness, talks politics, reads newspapers, hates the minister, and cries out for reform. He introduced into our peaceful vicinage the rebellious innovation of an illumination on the Queen's acquittal. Remonstrance and persuasion were in vain; he talked of liberty and broken windows—so we all lighted up. Oh! how he shone that night with candles, and laurel, and white bows, and gold paper, and a transparency (originally designed for a pocket handkerchief) with a flaming portrait of her Majesty, hatted and feathered, in red ochre. He had no rival in the village, that we all acknowledged; the very bonfire was less splendid; the little boys reserved their best crackers to be expended in his honour, and he gave them full sixpence more than anyone else. He would like an illumination once a month; for it must not be concealed that, in spite of gardening, of newspaper reading, of jaunting

about in his little cart, and frequenting both church and meeting, our worthy neighbour begins to feel the weariness of idleness. He hangs over his gate, and tries to entice passengers to stop and chat; he volunteers little jobs all round, smokes cherry trees to cure the blight, and traces and blows up all the wasps' nests in the parish. I have seen a great many wasps in our garden to-day, and shall enchant him with the intelligence. He even assists his wife in her sweepings and dustings. Poor man! he is a very respectable person, and would be a very happy one if he would add a little employment to his dignity. It would be the salt of life to him.

Next to his house, though parted from it by another long garden with a yew arbour at the end, is the pretty dwelling of the shoemaker, a pale, sickly-looking, black-haired man, the very model of sober industry. There he sits in his little shop from early morning till late at night. An earthquake would hardly stir him; the illumination did not. He stuck immovably to his last, from the first lighting up, through the long blaze and the slow decay, till his large, solitary candle was the only light in the place. One cannot conceive anything more perfect than the contempt which the man of transparencies and the man of shoes must have felt for each other on that evening. There was at least as much vanity in the sturdy industry as in the strenuous idleness, for our shoemaker is a man of substance—he employs three journeymen, two lame, and one a dwarf, so that his shop looks like an hospital; he has purchased the lease of his commodious dwelling, some even say that he has bought it out and out; and he has only one pretty daughter, a light, delicate, fair-haired

girl of fourteen, the champion, protectress, and playfellow of every brat under three years old, whom she jumps, dances, dandles, and feeds all day long. A very attractive person is that child-loving girl. I have never seen any one in her station who possessed so thoroughly that undefinable charm, the lady-look. See her on a Sunday in her simplicity and her white frock, and she might pass for an earl's daughter. She likes flowers, too, and has a profusion of white stocks under her window, as pure and delicate as herself.

The first house on the opposite side of the way is the blacksmith's; a gloomy dwelling, where the sun never seems to shine; dark and smoky within and without, like a forge. The blacksmith is a high officer in our little state, nothing less than a constable; but, alas! alas! when tumults arise, and the constable is called for, he will commonly be found in the thickest of the fray. Lucky would it be for his wife and her eight children if there were no public-house in the land; an inveterate inclination to enter those bewitching doors is Mr. Constable's only fault.

Next to this official dwelling is a spruce brick tenement, red, high, and narrow, boasting, one above another, three sash-windows, the only sash-windows in the village, with a clematis on one side and a rose on the other, tall and narrow like itself. That slender mansion has a fine, genteel look. The little parlour seems made for Hogarth's old maid and her stunted footboy; for tea and card parties—it would just hold one table; for the rustle of faded silks, and the splendour of old china; for the delight of four by honours, and a little snug, quiet scandal between the deals; for affected gentility and real starvation. This should

have been its destiny; but fate has been unpropitious: it belongs to a plump, merry, bustling dame, with four fat, rosy, noisy children, the very essence of vulgarity and plenty.

Then comes the village shop, like other village shops, multifarious as a bazaar; a repository for bread, shoes, tea, cheese, tape, ribands, and bacon; for everything, in short, except the one particular thing which you happen to want at the moment, and will be sure not to find. The people are civil and thriving, and frugal withal; they have let the upper part of their house to two young women (one of them is a pretty, blue-eyed girl) who teach little children their A B C, and make caps and gowns for their mammas—parcel school-mistress, parcel mantua-maker. I believe they find adorning the body a more profitable vocation than adorning the mind.

Divided from the shop by a narrow yard, and opposite the shoemaker's, is a habitation of whose inmates I shall say nothing. A cottage—no—a miniature house, with many additions, little odds and ends of places, pantries, and what not; all angles, and of a charming in-and-outness; a little bricked court before one half, and a little flower-yard before the other; the walls, old and weather-stained, covered with holyhocks, roses, honeysuckles, and a great apricot-tree; the casement full of geraniums; (ah, there is our superb white cat peeping out from among them); the closets (our landlord has the assurance to call them rooms) full of contrivances and corner-cupboards; and the little garden behind full of common flowers, tulips, pinks, larkspurs, peonies, stocks, and carnations, with an arbour of privet, not unlike a sentry-box, where one lives in a delicious

green light, and looks out on the gayest of all gay flower-beds. That house was built on purpose to show in what an exceeding small compass comfort may be packed. Well, I will loiter there no longer.

The next tenement is a place of importance, the Rose inn; a whitewashed building, retired from the road behind its fine swinging sign, with a little bow-window room coming out on one side, and forming, with our stable on the other, a sort of open square, which is the constant resort of carts, waggons, and return chaises. There are two carts there now, and mine host is serving them with beer in his eternal red waistcoat. He is a thriving man and a portly, as his waistcoat attests, which has been twice let out within this twelvemonth. Our landlord has a stirring wife, a hopeful son, and a daughter, the belle of the village; not so pretty as the fair nymph of the shoe-shop, and far less elegant, but ten times as fine; all curl-papers in the morning, like a porcupine, all curls in the afternoon, like a poodle, with more flounces than curl-papers, and more lovers than curls. Miss Phœbe is fitter for town than country; and to do her justice, she has a consciousness of that fitness, and turns her steps townwards as often as she can. She is gone to B—— to-day with her last and principal lover, a recruiting sergeant—a man as tall as Sergeant Kite, and as impudent. Some day or other he will carry off Miss Phœbe.

In a line with the bow-window room is a low garden-wall, belonging to a house under repair—the white house opposite the collar-maker's shop, with four lime-trees before it, and a waggon-load of bricks at the door. That house is the plaything of a wealthy, well-meaning, whimsical person who lives

about a mile off. He has a passion for brick and mortar; and, being too wise to meddle with his own residence, diverts himself with altering and re-altering, improving and re-improving, doing and undoing here. It is a perfect Penelope's web. Carpenters and bricklayers have been at work for these eighteen months, and yet I sometimes stand and wonder whether anything has really been done. One exploit in last June was, however, by no means equivocal. Our good neighbour fancied that the limes shaded the rooms, and made them dark (there was not a creature in the house but the workmen), so he had all the leaves stripped from every tree. There they stood, poor miserable skeletons, as bare as Christmas under the glowing midsummer sun. Nature revenged herself in her own sweet and gracious manner; fresh leaves sprang out, and at nearly Christmas the foliage was as brilliant as when the outrage was committed.

Next door lives a carpenter, "famed ten miles round, and worthy all his fame"—few cabinet-makers surpass him, with his excellent wife, and their little daughter Lizzy, the plaything and queen of the village, a child three years old according to the register, but six in size and strength and intellect, in power and in self-will. She manages everybody in the place, her schoolmistress included; turns the wheeler's children out of their own little cart, and makes them draw her; seduces cakes and lolypops from the very shop window; makes the lazy carry her, the silent talk to her, the grave romp with her; does anything she pleases; is absolutely irresistible. Her chief attraction lies in her exceeding power of loving, and her firm reliance on the love and indulgence of others. How impossible it would be to dis-

LIZZY ROLLING AND LAUGHING, MAYFLOWER PLAYING ABOUT HER, LIKE SUMMER LIGHTNING.—*Page* 12.

appoint the dear little girl when she runs to meet you, slides her pretty hand into yours, looks up gladly in your face, and says, "Come!" You must go; you cannot help it. Another part of her charm is her singular beauty. Together with a good deal of the character of Napoleon, she has something of his square, sturdy, upright form, with the finest limbs in the world, a complexion purely English, a round, laughing face, sunburnt and rosy, large, merry, blue eyes, curling brown hair, and a wonderful play of countenance. She has the imperial attitudes, too, and loves to stand with her hands behind her, or folded over her bosom; and sometimes, when she has a little touch of shyness, she clasps them together on the top of her head, pressing down her shining curls, and looking so exquisitely pretty! Yes, Lizzy is queen of the village! She has but one rival in her dominions, a certain white greyhound called Mayflower, much her friend, who resembles her in beauty and strength, in playfulness, and almost in sagacity, and reigns over the animal world as she over the human. They are both coming with me, Lizzy and Lizzy's "pretty May." We are now at the end of the street; a cross lane, a rope-walk shaded with limes and oaks, and a cool, clear pond overhung with elms, lead us to the bottom of the hill. There is still one house round the corner, ending in a picturesque wheeler's shop. The dwelling-house is more ambitious. Look at the fine flowered window-blinds, the green door with the brass knocker, and the somewhat prim but very civil person, who is sending off a labouring man with sirs and curtsies enough for a prince of the blood. Those are the curate's lodgings —apartments his landlady would call them: he lives

with his own family four miles off, but once or twice a-week he comes to his neat little parlour to write sermons, to marry, or to bury, as the case may require. Never were better or kinder people than his host and hostess: and there is a reflection of clerical importance about them since their connection with the Church which is quite edifying—a decorum, a gravity, a solemn politeness. Oh, to see the worthy wheeler carry the gown after his lodger on a Sunday, nicely pinned up in his wife's best handkerchief!—or to hear him rebuke a squalling child or a squabbling woman! The curate is nothing to him. He is fit to be perpetual churchwarden.

We must now cross the lane into the shady rope-walk. That pretty white cottage opposite, which stands straggling at the end of the village in a garden full of flowers, belongs to our mason, the shortest of men, and his handsome, tall wife: he, a dwarf, with the voice of a giant; one starts when he begins to talk, as if he were shouting through a speaking-trumpet; she, the sister, daughter, and grand-daughter of a long line of gardeners, and no contemptible one herself. It is very magnanimous in me not to hate her; for she beats me in my own way, in chrysanthemums, and dahlias, and the like gauds. Her plants are sure to live; mine have a sad trick of dying, perhaps because I love them "not wisely, but too well," and kill them with over-kindness. Half-way up the hill is another detached cottage, the residence of an officer and his beautiful family. That eldest boy, who is hanging over the gate, and looking with such intense childish admiration at my Lizzy, might be a model for a Cupid.

How pleasantly the road winds up the hill, with its

broad, green borders and hedge-rows so thickly timbered! How finely the evening sun falls on that sandy excavated bank, and touches the farm-house on the top of the eminence! and how clearly defined and relieved is the figure of the man who is just coming down! It is poor John Evans, the gardener—an excellent gardener till about ten years ago, when he lost his wife, and became insane. He was sent to St. Luke's, and dismissed as cured; but his power was gone and his strength; he could no longer manage a garden, nor submit to the restraint, nor encounter the fatigue of regular employment: so he retreated to the workhouse, the pensioner and factotum of the village, amongst whom he divided his services. His mind often wanders, intent on some fantastic and impracticable plan, and lost to present objects; but he is perfectly harmless, and full of a child-like simplicity, a smiling contentedness, a most touching gratitude. Every one is kind to John Evans, for there is that about him which must be loved; and his unprotectedness, his utter defencelessness, have an irresistible claim on every better feeling. I know nobody who inspires so deep and tender a pity; he improves all around him. He is useful, too, to the extent of his little power; will do anything, but loves gardening best, and still piques himself on his old arts of pruning fruit-trees and raising cucumbers. He is the happiest of men just now, for he has the management of a melon bed—a melon bed!—fie! What a grand, pompous name was that for three melon plants under a hand-light! John Evans is sure that they will succeed. We shall see; as the chancellor said, "I doubt."

We are now on the very brow of the eminence, close

to the Hill-house and its beautiful garden. On the outer edge of the paling, hanging over the bank that skirts the road, is an old thorn—such a thorn! The long sprays covered with snowy blossoms, so graceful, so elegant, so lightsome, and yet so rich! There only wants a pool under the thorn to give a still lovelier reflection, quivering and trembling, like a tuft of feathers, whiter and greener than the life, and more prettily mixed with the bright blue sky. There should, indeed, be a pool; but on the dark grass-plot, under the high bank, which is crowned by that magnificent plume, there is something that does almost as well—Lizzy and Mayflower in the midst of a game at romps, "making a sunshine in the shady place;" Lizzy rolling, laughing, clapping her hands, and glowing like a rose; Mayflower playing about her like summer lightning, dazzling the eyes with her sudden turns, her leaps, her bounds, her attacks, and her escapes. She darts round the lovely little girl, with the same momentary touch that the swallow skims over the water, and has exactly the same power of flight, the same matchless ease, and strength, and grace. What a pretty picture they would make; what a pretty foreground they do make to the real landscape! The road winding down the hill with a slight bend, like that in the High Street at Oxford; a waggon slowly ascending, and a horseman passing it at a full trot—(ah! Lizzy, Mayflower will certainly desert you to have a gambol with that blood-horse!) half way down, just at the turn, the red cottage of the lieutenant, covered with vines, the very image of comfort and content; farther down, on the opposite side, the small, white dwelling of the little mason: then the limes and the rope-walk; then the village street,

peeping through the trees, whose clustering tops hide all but the chimneys, and various roofs of the houses, and here and there some angle of a wall: farther on, the elegant town of B——, with its fine old church-towers and spires; the whole view shut in by a range of chalky hills; and over every part of the picture, trees so profusely scattered, that it appears like a woodland scene, with glades and villages intermixed. The trees are of all kinds and all hues, chiefly the finely-shaped elm, of so bright and deep a green, the tips of whose high outer branches drop down with such a crisp and garland-like richness, and the oak, whose stately form is just now so splendidly adorned by the sunny colouring of the young leaves. Turning again up the hill, we find ourselves on that peculiar charm of English scenery, a green common divided by the road; the right side fringed by hedge-rows and trees, with cottages and farm-houses irregularly placed, and terminated by a double avenue of noble oaks; the left, prettier still, dappled by bright pools of water, and islands of cottages and cottage-gardens, and sinking gradually down to corn-fields and meadows, and an old farm-house, with pointed roofs and clustered chimneys, looking out from its blooming orchard, and backed by woody hills. The common is itself the prettiest spot of the prospect: half covered with low furze, whose golden blossoms reflect so intensely the last beams of the setting sun, and alive with cows and sheep, and two sets of cricketers; one of young men, surrounded by spectators, some standing, some sitting, some stretched on the grass, all taking a delighted interest in the game; the other, a merry group of little boys, at a humble distance, for whom even cricket is scarcely lively enough, shouting, leaping,

and enjoying themselves to their hearts' content But cricketers and country boys are too important persons in our village to be talked of merely as figures in the landscape. They deserve an individual introduction—an essay to themselves—and they shall have it. No fear of forgetting the good-humoured faces that meet us in our walks every day.

WALKS IN THE COUNTRY.

FROST.

JANUARY 23d.—At noon to-day I and my white greyhound, Mayflower, set out for a walk into a very beautiful world—a sort of silent fairy-land—a creation of that matchless magician, the hoar-frost. There had been just snow enough to cover the earth and all its covers with one sheet of pure and uniform white, and just time enough since the snow had fallen to allow the hedges to be freed of their fleecy load, and clothed with a delicate coating of rime. The atmosphere was deliciously calm; soft, even mild, in spite of the thermometer; no perceptible air, but a stillness that might almost be felt, the sky, rather grey than blue, throwing out in bold relief the snow-covered roofs of our village, and the rimy trees that rise above them, and the sun shining dimly as through a veil, giving a pale, fair light, like the moon, only brighter. There was a silence, too, that might become the moon, as we stood at our little gate looking up the quiet street; a Sabbath-like pause of work and play, rare on a work-day; nothing was audible but the pleasant hum of frost, that low, monotonous sound, which is perhaps the nearest approach that life and nature can make to absolute silence. The very waggons as they come

down the hill along the beaten track of crisp, yellowish frost-dust, glide along like shadows; even May's bounding footsteps, at her height of glee and of speed, fall like snow upon snow.

But we shall have noise enough presently: May has stopped at Lizzy's door; and Lizzy, as she sat on the window-sill with her bright, rosy face laughing through the casement, has seen her and disappeared. She is coming. No! The key is turning in the door, and sounds of evil omen issue through the key-hole—sturdy "Let me outs," and "I will goes," mixed with shrill cries on May and on me from Lizzy, piercing through a low continuous harangue, of which the prominent parts are apologies, chilblains, sliding, broken bones, lollypops, rods, and gingerbread, from Lizzy's careful mother. "Don't scratch the door, May! Don't roar so, my Lizzy! We'll call for you as we come back."—"I'll go now! Let me out! I will go!" are the last words of Miss Lizzy. Mem.—Not to spoil that child—if I can help it. But I do think her mother might have let the poor little soul walk with us to-day. Nothing worse for children than coddling. Nothing better for chilblains than exercise. Besides, I don't believe she has any—and as to breaking her bones in sliding, I don t suppose there's a slide on the common. These murmuring cogitations have brought us up the hill, and half-way across the light and airy common, with its bright expanse of snow and its clusters of cottages, whose turf fires send such wreathes of smoke sailing up the air, and diffuse such aromatic fragrance around. And now comes the delightful sound of childish voices, ringing with glee and merriment almost from beneath our feet. Ah, Lizzy, your

mother was right! They are shouting from that deep, irregular pool, all glass now, where, on two long, smooth, liny slides, half-a-dozen ragged urchins are slipping along in tottering triumph. Half-a-dozen steps bring us to the bank right above them. May can hardly resist the temptation of joining her friends, for most of the varlets are of her acquaintance, especially the rogue who leads the slide—he with the brimless hat, whose bronzed complexion and white flaxen hair, reversing the usual lights and shadows of the human countenance, give so strange and foreign a look to his flat and comic features. This hobgoblin, Jack Rapley by name, is May's great crony; and she stands on the brink of the steep, irregular descent, her black eyes fixed full upon him, as if she intended him the favour of jumping on his head. She does: she is down, and upon him: but Jack Rapley is not easily to be knocked off his feet. He saw her coming, and in the moment of her leap sprung dexterously off the slide on the rough ice, steadying himself by the shoulder of the next in file, which unlucky follower, thus unexpectedly checked in his career, fell plump backwards, knocking down the rest of the line like a nest of card-houses. There is no harm done; but there they lie, roaring, kicking, sprawling, in every attitude of comic distress, whilst Jack Rapley and Mayflower, sole authors of this calamity, stand apart from the throng, fondling, and coquetting, and complimenting each other, and very visibly laughing, May in her black eyes, Jack in his wide, close-shut mouth, and his whole monkey-face, at their comrades' mischances. I think, Miss May, you may as well come up again, and leave Master Rapley to fight your battles. He'll get out of the scrape. He is a rustic wit—a sort of Robin Good-

fellow—the sauciest, idlest, cleverest, best-natured boy in the parish; always foremost in mischief, and always ready to do a good turn. The sages of our village predict sad things of Jack Rapley, so that I am sometimes a little ashamed to confess, before wise people, that I have a lurking predilection for him (in common with other naughty ones), and that I like to hear him talk to May almost as well as she does. "Come, May!" and up she springs, as light as a bird. The road is gay now; carts and post-chaises, and girls in red cloaks, and, afar off, looking almost like a toy, the coach. It meets us fast and soon. How much happier the walkers look than the riders—especially the frost-bitten gentleman, and the shivering lady with the invisible face, sole passengers of that commodious machine! Hooded, veiled, and bonneted, as she is, one sees from her attitude how miserable she would look uncovered.

Another pond, and another noise of children. More sliding? Oh, no! This is a sort of higher pretension. Our good neighbour, the lieutenant, skating, and his own pretty little boys, and two or three other four-year-old elves, standing on the brink in an ecstasy of joy and wonder! O what happy spectators! And what a happy performer! They admiring, he admired, with an ardour and sincerity never excited by all the quadrilles and the spread-eagles of the Seine and the Serpentine. He really skates well, though, and I am glad I came this way; for, with all the father's feelings sitting gaily at his heart, it must still gratify the pride of skill to have one spectator at that solitary pond who has seen skating before.

Now we have reached the trees—the beautiful

trees! never so beautiful as to-day. Imagine the effect of a straight and regular double avenue of oaks, nearly a mile long, arching over-head, and closing into perspective like the roof and columns of a cathedral, every tree and branch incrusted with the bright and delicate congelation of hoar-frost, white and pure as snow, delicate and defined as carved ivory. How beautiful it is, how uniform, how various, how filling, how satiating to the eye and to the mind —above all, how melancholy! There is a thrilling awfulness, an intense feeling of simple power in that naked and colourless beauty which falls on the earth, like the thoughts of death—death pure, and glorious, and smiling—but still death. Sculpture has always the same effect on my imagination, and painting never. Colour is life.—We are now at the end of this magnificent avenue, and at the top of a steep eminence commanding a wide view over four counties—a landscape of snow. A deep lane leads abruptly down the hill; a mere narrow cart-track, sinking between high banks clothed with fern and furze and low broom, crowned with luxuriant hedgerows, and famous for their summer smell of thyme. How lovely these banks are now—the tall weeds and the gorse fixed and stiffened in the hoar-frost, which fringes round the bright, prickly holly, the pendent foliage of the bramble, and the deep orange leaves of the pollard oaks! Oh, this is rime in its loveliest form! And there is still a berry here and there on the holly, "blushing in its natural coral," through the delicate tracery, still a stray hip or haw for the birds, who abound here always. The poor birds, how tame they are, how sadly tame! There is the beautiful and rare crested wren, "that shadow of a bird," as White,

of Selborne, calls it, perched in the middle of the hedge, nestling, as it were, amongst the cold, bare boughs, seeking, poor, pretty thing, for the warmth it will not find. And there, farther on, just under the bank, by the slender runlet, which still trickles between its transparent fantastic margin of thin ice, as if it were a thing of life—there, with a swift, scudding motion, flits, in short, low flights, the gorgeous kingfisher, its magnificent plumage of scarlet and blue flashing in the sun, like the glories of some tropical bird. He is come for water to this little spring by the hill-side—water which even his long bill and slender head can hardly reach, so nearly do the fantastic forms of those garland-like icy margins meet over the tiny stream beneath. It is rarely that one sees the shy beauty so close or so long; and it is pleasant to see him in the grace and beauty of his natural liberty, the only way to look at a bird. We used, before we lived in a street, to fix a little board outside the parlour window, and cover it with bread crumbs in the hard weather. It was quite delightful to see the pretty things come and feed, to conquer their shyness, and do away with their mistrust. First came the more social tribes, "the robin red-breast and the wren," cautiously, suspiciously, picking up a crumb on the wing, with the little, keen, bright eye fixed on the window; then they would stop for two pecks; then stay till they were satisfied. The shyer birds, tamed by their example, came next; and at last, one saucy fellow of a blackbird—a sad glutton, he would clear the board in two minutes—used to tap his yellow bill against the window for more. How we loved the fearless confidence of that fine frank-hearted creature! And surely he loved us.

I wonder the practice is not more general. "May! May! naughty May!" She has frightened away the kingfisher; and now in her coaxing penitence she is covering me with snow. "Come, pretty May! it is time to go home."

THAW.

January 28th.—We have had rain, and snow, and frost, and rain again; four days of absolute confine ment. Now it is a thaw and a flood; but our light, gravelly soil, and country boots, and country hardihood, will carry us through. What a dripping, comfortless day it is! just like the last days of November: no sun, no sky, grey or blue; one low, overhanging, dark, dismal cloud, like London smoke: Mayflower is out coursing too, and Lizzy is gone to school. Never mind. Up the hill again! Walk we must. Oh, what a watery world to look back upon! Thames, Kennet, London—all overflowed; our famous town, inland once, turned into a sort of Venice; C. park converted into an island; and the long range of meadows from B. to W. one huge, unnatural lake, with trees growing out of it. Oh, what a watery world!—I will look at it no longer. I will walk on. The road is alive again. Noise is re-born. Waggons creak, horses splash, carts rattle, and pattens paddle through the dirt with more than their usual clink. The common has its old, fine tints of green and brown, and its old variety of inhabitants, horses, cows, sheep, pigs, and donkeys. The ponds are unfrozen, and cackling geese and gabbling ducks have replaced the lieutenant and Jack Rapley. The avenue is chill and dark, the hedges are dripping, the lanes knee-deep, and all nature is in a state of "dissolution and thaw."

THE FIRST PRIMROSE.

MARCH 6th.—Fine March weather: boisterous, blustering, much wind and squalls of rain; and yet the sky, where the clouds are swept away, deliciously blue, with snatches of sunshine, bright, and clear, and healthful, and the roads, in spite of the slight, glittering showers, crisply dry. Altogether, the day is tempting, very tempting. It will not do for the dear common, that windmill of a walk; but the close, sheltered lanes at the bottom of the hill, which keep out just enough of the stormy air, and let in all the sun, will be delightful. Past our old house, and round by the winding lanes, and the workhouse, and across the lea, and so into the turnpike road again—that is our route for to-day. Forth we set, Mayflower and I, rejoicing in the sunshine, and still more in the wind, which gives such an intense feeling of existence, and, co-operating with brisk motion, sets our blood and our spirits in a glow. For mere physical pleasure there is nothing, perhaps, equal to the enjoyment of being drawn in a light carriage against such a wind as this, by a blood-horse at his height of speed. Walking comes next to it; but walking is not quite so luxurious or so spiritual; not quite so much what one fancies of flying, or being carried above the clouds in a balloon.

Nevertheless, a walk is a good thing; especially under this southern hedge-row, where nature is just beginning to live again; the periwinkles, with their starry blue flowers, and their shining, myrtle-like leaves, garlanding the bushes; woodbines and elder-trees pushing out their small, swelling buds; and grasses and mosses springing forth in every variety of brown and green. Here we are at the corner where four lanes meet, or rather where a passable road of stones and gravel crosses an impassable one of beautiful but treacherous turf, and where the small, white farm-house, scarcely larger than a cottage, and the well-stocked rick-yard behind, tell of comfort and order, but leave all unguessed the great riches of the master. How he became so rich is almost a puzzle; for, though the farm be his own, it is not large; and though prudent and frugal on ordinary occasions, Farmer Barnard is no miser. His horses, dogs, and pigs are the best kept in the parish—May herself, although her beauty be injured by her fatness, half envies the plight of his bitch Fly; his wife's gowns and shawls cost as much again as any shawls or gowns in the village; his dinner parties (to be sure they are not frequent) display twice the ordinary quantity of good things—two couples of ducks, two dishes of green peas, two turkey poults, two gammons of bacon, two plum-puddings; moreover, he keeps a single-horse chaise, and has built and endowed a Methodist chapel. Yet is he the richest man in these parts. Everything prospers with him. Money drifts about him like snow. He looks like a rich man. There is a sturdy squareness of face and figure; a good-humoured obstinacy; a civil importance. He never boasts of his wealth, or gives himself undue

airs; but nobody can meet him at market or vestry without finding out immediately that he is the richest man there. They have no child to all this money; but there is an adopted nephew, a fine, spirited lad, who may, perhaps, some day or other, play the part of a fountain to the reservoir.

Now turn up the wide road till we come to the open common, with its park-like trees, its beautiful stream, wandering and twisting along, and its rural bridge. Here we turn again, past that other white farm-house, half hidden by the magnificent elms which stand before it. Ah! riches dwell not there, but there is found the next best thing—an industrious and light-hearted poverty. Twenty years ago Rachel Hilton was the prettiest and merriest lass in the country. Her father, an old gamekeeper, had retired to a village ale-house, where his good beer, his social humour, and his black-eyed daughter, brought much custom. She had lovers by the score; but Joseph White, the dashing and lively son of an opulent farmer, carried off the fair Rachel. They married and settled here, and here they live still, as merrily as ever, with fourteen children of all ages and sizes, from nineteen years to nineteen months, working harder than any people in the parish, and enjoying themselves more. I would match them for labour and laughter against any family in England. She is a blithe, jolly dame, whose beauty has amplified into comeliness; he is tall, and thin, and bony, with sinews like whip-cord, a strong, lively voice, a sharp, weather-beaten face, and eyes and lips that smile and brighten when he speaks into a most contagious hilarity. They are very poor, and I often wish them richer; but I don't know—perhaps it might put them out.

Quite close to farmer White's is a little ruinous cottage, whitewashed once, and now in a sad state of betweenity, where dangling stockings and shirts, swelled by the wind, drying in a neglected garden, give signal of a washerwoman. There dwells at present in single blessedness, Betty Adams, the wife of our sometimes gardener. I never saw any one who so much reminded me in person of that lady whom everybody knows, Mistress Meg Merrilees—as tall, as grizzled, as stately, as dark, as gipsy-looking, bonneted and gowned like her prototype, and almost as oracular. Here the resemblance ceases. Mrs. Adams is a perfectly honest, industrious, painstaking person, who earns a good deal of money by washing and charing, and spends it in other luxuries than tidiness—in green tea, and gin, and snuff. Her husband lives in a great family, ten miles off. He is a capital gardener—or rather he would be so, if he were not too ambitious. He undertakes all things, and finishes none. But a smooth tongue, a knowing look, and a great capacity of labour, carry him through. Let him but like his ale and his master, and he will do work enough for four. Give him his own way, and his full quantum, and nothing comes amiss to him.

Ah, May is bounding forward! Her silly heart leaps at the sight of the old place—and so in good truth does mine. What a pretty place it was—or rather, how pretty I thought it! I suppose I should have thought any place so where I had spent eighteen happy years. But it was really pretty. A large, heavy, white house, in the simplest style, surrounded by fine oaks and elms, and tall, massy plantations shaded down into a beautiful lawn by wild overgrown shrubs, bowery acacias, ragged sweet-briers, promon-

tories of dog-wood, and Portugal laurel, and bays overhung by laburnum and bird-cherry; a long piece of water letting light into the picture, and looking just like a natural stream, the banks as rude and wild as the shrubbery, interspersed with broom, and furze, and bramble, and pollard oaks covered with ivy and honeysuckle; the whole enclosed by an old mossy park paling, and terminating in a series of rich meadows, richly planted. This is an exact description of the home which, three years ago, it nearly broke my heart to leave. What a tearing up by the root it was; I have pitied cabbage-plants and celery, and all transplantable things, ever since; though, in common with them, and with other vegetables, the first agony of the transportation being over, I have taken such firm and tenacious hold of my new soil, that I would not for the world be pulled up again, even to be restored to the old beloved ground—not even if its beauty were undiminished, which is by no means the case; for in those three years it has thrice changed masters, and every successive possessor has brought the curse of improvement upon the place; so that between filling up the water to cure dampness, cutting down trees to let in prospects, planting to keep them out, shutting up windows to darken the inside of the house (by which means one end looks precisely as an eight of spades would do that should have the misfortune to lose one of his corner pips), and building colonnades to lighten the out, added to a general clearance of pollards, and brambles, and ivy, and honeysuckles, and park palings, and irregular shrubs, the poor place is so transmogrified, that if it had 'ts old looking-glass, the water, back again, it would not know its own face. And yet I love to

haunt round about it: so does May. Her particular attraction is a certain broken bank full of rabbit burrows, into which she insinuates her long, pliant head and neck, and tears her pretty feet by vain scratchings; mine is a warm, sunny hedge-row, in the same remote field, famous for early flowers. Never was a spot more variously flowery: primroses yellow, lilac white, violets of either hue, cowslips, oxslips, arums, orchises, wild hyacinths, ground ivy, pansies, strawberries, heart's-ease, formed a small part of the Flora of that wild hedge-row. How profusely they covered the sunny open slope under the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods"—and how often have I started to see the early innocent brown snake, who loved the spot as well as I did, winding along the young blossoms, or rustling among the fallen leaves! There are primrose leaves already, and short, green buds, but no flowers; not even in that furze cradle so full of roots, where they used to blow as in a basket. No, my May, no rabbits! no primroses! We may as well get over the gate into the woody winding lane, which will bring us home again.

Here we are making the best of our way between the old elms that arch so solemnly overhead, dark and sheltered even now. They say that a spirit haunts this deep pool—a white lady without a head. I cannot say that I have seen her, often as I have paced this lane at deep midnight, to hear the nightingales, and look at the glowworms—but there, better and rarer than a thousand ghosts, dearer even than nightingales or glowworms, there is a primrose, the first of the year; a tuft of primroses, springing in yonder sheltered nook, from the mossy roots of an old willow, and living again in the clear, bright pool. Oh,

how beautiful they are—three fully blown, and two bursting buds! How glad I am I came this way! They are not to be reached. Even Jack Rapley's love of the difficult and unattainable would fail him here: May herself could not stand on that steep bank. So much the better. Who could wish to disturb them? There they live in their innocent and fragrant beauty, sheltered from the storms, and rejoicing in the sunshine, and looking as if they could feel their happiness. Who would disturb them? Oh, how glad I am I came this way home!

VIOLETING.

MARCH 27th.—It is a dull, grey morning, with a dewy feeling in the air; fresh, but not windy; cool, but not cold; the very day for a person newly arrived from the heat, the glare, the noise, and the fever of London, to plunge into the remotest labyrinths of the country, and regain the repose of mind, the calmness of heart, which has been lost in that great Babel. I must go violeting—it is a necessity—and I must go alone; the sound of a voice, even my Lizzy's, the touch of Mayflower's head, even the bounding of her elastic foot, would disturb the serenity of feeling which I am trying to recover. I shall go quite alone, with my little basket, twisted like a bee-hive, which I love so well, because *she* gave it to me, and kept sacred to violets and to those whom I love; and I shall get out of the highroad the moment I can. I would not meet any one just now, even of those whom I best like to meet.

Ha!—Is not that group—a gentleman on a blood-horse, a lady keeping pace with him so gracefully and easily—see how prettily her veil waves in the wind created by her own rapid motion!—and that gay, gallant boy, on the gallant white Arabian, curveting at their side, but ready to spring before them every

instant—is not that chivalrous-looking party Mr. and Mrs. M., and dear B.? No! the servant is in a different livery. It is some of the ducal family, and one of their young Etonians. I may go on. I shall meet no one now; for I have fairly left the road, and am crossing the lea by one of those wandering paths, amidst the gorse, and the heath, and the low broom, which the sheep and lambs have made—a path turfy, elastic, thymy and sweet, even at this season.

We have the good fortune to live in an unenclosed parish, and may thank the wise obstinacy of two or three sturdy farmers, and the lucky unpopularity of a ranting madcap lord of the manor, for preserving the delicious green patches, the islets of wilderness amidst cultivation, which form, perhaps, the peculiar beauty of English scenery. The common that I am passing now—the lea, as it is called—is one of the loveliest of these favoured spots. It is a little sheltered scene, retiring, as it were, from the village; sunk amidst higher lands—hills would be almost too grand a word: edged on one side by one gay highroad, and intersected by another; and surrounded by a most picturesque confusion of meadows, cottages, farms, and orchards; with a great pond in one corner, unusually bright and clear, giving a delightful cheerfulness and daylight to the picture. The swallows haunt that pond; so do the children. There is a merry group round it now; I have seldom seen it without one. Children love water, clear, bright, sparkling water; it excites and feeds their curiosity; it is motion and life.

The path that I am treading leads to a less lively spot, to that large, heavy building on one side of the common, whose solid wings, jutting out far beyond

the main body, occupy three sides of a square, and give a cold, shadowy look to the court. On one side is a gloomy garden, with an old man digging in it, laid out in straight dark beds of vegetables, potatoes, cabbages, onions, beans ; all earthly and mouldy as a newly-dug grave. Not a flower or flowering shrub ! Not a rose-tree or currant-bush ! Nothing but for sober, melancholy use. Oh, different from the long irregular slips of the cottage-gardens, with their gay bunches of polyanthuses and crocuses, their wall-flowers sending sweet odours through the narrow casement, and their gooseberry trees bursting into a brilliancy of leaf, whose vivid greenness has the effect of a blossom on the eye ! Oh, how different ! On the other side of this gloomy abode is a meadow of that deep, intense emerald hue, which denotes the presence of stagnant water, surrounded by willows at regular distances, and like the garden, separated from the common by a wide, moat-like ditch. That is the parish workhouse. All about it is solid, substantial, useful ; but so dreary ! so cold ! so dark ! There are children in the court, and yet all is silent. I always hurry past the place as if it were a prison. Restraint, sickness, age, extreme poverty, misery, which I have no power to remove or alleviate—these are the ideas, the feelings, which the sight of those walls excites ; yet, perhaps, if not certainly, they contain less of that extreme desolation than the morbid fancy is apt to paint. There will be found order, cleanliness, food, clothing, warmth, refuge for the homeless, medicine and attendance for the sick, rest and sufficiency for old age, and sympathy—the true and active sympathy which the poor show to the poor—for the unhappy. There may be worse places than a parish workhouse

—and yet I hurry past it. The feeling, the prejudice, will not be controlled.

The end of the dreary garden edges off into a close-sheltered lane, wandering and winding, like a rivulet, in gentle "sinuosities" (to use a word once applied by Mr. Wilberforce to the Thames at Henley), amidst green meadows, all alive with cattle, sheep, and beautiful lambs, in the very spring and pride of their tottering prettiness; or fields of arable land, more lively still with troops of stooping bean-setters, women and children, in all varieties of costume and colour; and ploughs and harrows, with their whistling boys and steady carters, going through, with a slow and plodding industry, the main business of this busy season. What work bean-setting is! What a reverse of the position assigned to man to distinguish him from the beasts of the field! Only think of stooping for six, eight, ten hours a-day, drilling holes in the earth with a little stick, and then dropping in the beans one by one. They are paid according to the quantity they plant: and some of the poor women used to be accused of clumping them—that is to say, of dropping more than one bean into a hole. It seems to me, considering the temptation, that not to clump is to be at the very pinnacle of human virtue.

Another turn in the lane, and we come to the old house standing amongst the high elms—the old farm-house, which always, I don't know why, carries back my imagination to Shakespeare's days. It is a long, low, irregular building, with one room, at an angle from the house, covered with ivy, fine white-veined ivy; the first floor of the main building projecting and supported by oaken beams, and one of the windows below, with its old casement and long narrow panes,

forming the half of a shallow hexagon. A porch, with seats in it, surmounted by a pinnacle, pointed roofs, and clustered chimneys, complete the picture! Alas! it is little else but a picture! The very walls are crumbling to decay under a careless landlord and ruined tenant.

Now a few yards farther, and I reach the bank. Ah! I smell them already—their exquisite perfume steams and lingers in this moist, heavy air. Through this little gate, and along the green south bank of this green wheat-field, and they burst upon me, the lovely violets, in tenfold loveliness. The ground is covered with them, white and purple, enamelling the short, dewy grass, looking but the more vividly coloured under the dull, leaden sky. There they lie by hundreds, by thousands. In former years I have been used to watch them from the tiny green bud, till one or two stole into bloom. They never came on me before in such a sudden and luxuriant glory of simple beauty—and I do really owe one pure and genuine pleasure to feverish London! How beautiful they are placed, too, on this sloping bank, with the palm branches waving over them, full of early bees, and mixing their honeyed scent with the more delicate violet odour! How transparent and smooth and lusty are the branches, full of sap and life! And there, just by the old mossy root, is a superb tuft of primroses, with a yellow butterfly hovering over them, like a flower floating on the air. What happiness to sit on this tufty knoll, and fill my basket with the blossoms! What a renewal of heart and mind! To inhabit such a scene of peace and sweetness is again to be fearless, gay, and gentle as a child. Then it is that thought becomes poetry, and feeling religion. Then it

is that we are happy and good. Oh, that my whole life could pass so, floating on blissful and innocent sensation, enjoying in peace and gratitude the common blessings of Nature, thankful above all for the simple habits, the healthful temperament, which render them so dear! Alas! who may dare expect a life of such happiness? But I can at least snatch and prolong the fleeting pleasure, can fill my basket with pure flowers, and my heart with pure thoughts; can gladden my little home with their sweetness; can divide my treasures with one, a dear one, who cannot seek them; can see them when I shut my eyes; and dream of them when I fall asleep.

THE COPSE.

APRIL 18th.—Sad, wintry weather; a north-east wind; a sun that puts out one's eyes, without affording the slightest warmth; dryness that chaps lips and hands like a frost in December; rain that comes chilly and arrowy like hail in January; nature at a dead pause; no seeds up in the garden; no leaves out in the hedge-rows; no cowslips swinging their pretty bells in the fields; no nightingales in the dingles; no swallows skimming round the great pond; no cuckoos (that ever I should miss that rascally sonneteer!) in any part. Nevertheless, there is something of a charm in this wintry spring, this putting-back of the seasons. If the flower-clock must stand still for a month or two, could it choose a better time than that of the primroses and violets? I never remember (and for such gauds my memory, if not very good for aught of wise or useful, may be trusted) such an affluence of the one or such a duration of the other. Primrosy is the epithet which this year will retain in my recollection. Hedge, ditch, meadow, field, even the very paths and highways, are set with them; but their chief *habitat* is a certain copse, about a mile off, where they are spread like a carpet, and where I go to visit them rather oftener than quite comports with the dignity of

a lady of mature age. I am going thither this very afternoon, and May and her company are going too.

This Mayflower of mine is a strange animal. Instinct and imitation make in her an approach to reason which is sometimes almost startling. She mimics all that she sees us do with the dexterity of a monkey, and far more of gravity and apparent purpose; cracks nuts and eats them; gathers currants, and severs them from the stalk with the most delicate nicety; filches and munches apples and pears; is as dangerous in an orchard as a schoolboy; smells to flowers; smiles at meeting; answers in a pretty lively voice when spoken to (sad pity that the language should be unknown!) and has greatly the advantage of us in a conversation, inasmuch as our meaning is certainly clear to her—all this and a thousand amusing prettinesses (to say nothing of her canine feat of bringing her game straight to her master's feet, and refusing to resign it to any hand but his) does my beautiful greyhound perform untaught, by the mere effect of imitation and sagacity. Well, May, at the end of the coursing season, having lost Brush, our old spaniel, her great friend, and the blue greyhound, Mariette, her comrade and rival, both of which four-footed worthies were sent out to keep for the summer, began to find solitude a weary condition, and to look abroad for company. Now it so happened that the same suspension of sport which had reduced our little establishment from three dogs to one, had also dispersed the splendid kennel of a celebrated courser in our neighbourhood, three of whose finest young dogs came home to "their walk" (as the sporting phrase goes) at the collarmaker's in our village. May, accordingly, on the first morning of her

solitude (she had never taken the slightest notice of her neighbours before, although they had sojourned in our street upwards of a fortnight), bethought herself of the timely resource offered to her by the vicinity of these canine *beaux*, and went up boldly and knocked at their stable-door, which was already very commodiously on the half-latch. The three dogs came out with much alertness and gallantry, and May, declining apparently to enter their territories, brought them off to her own. This manœuvre has been repeated every day, with one variation; of the three dogs, the first a brindle, the second a yellow, and the third a black, the two first only are now allowed to walk or consort with her, and the last, poor fellow, for no fault that I can discover except May's caprice, is driven away not only by the fair lady, but even by his old companions—is, so to say, sent to Coventry. Of her two permitted followers, the yellow gentleman, Saladin by name, is decidedly the favourite. He is, indeed, May's shadow, and will walk with me whether I choose or not. It is quite impossible to get rid of him unless by discarding Miss May also—and to accomplish a walk in the country without her would be like an adventure of Don Quixote without his faithful squire Sancho.

So forth we set, May and I, and Saladin and the brindle; May and myself walking with the sedateness and decorum befitting our sex and age (she is five years old this grass, rising six)—the young things, for the soldan and the brindle are (not meaning any disrespect) little better than puppies, frisking and frolicking as best pleased them.

Our route lay for the first part along the sheltered, quiet lanes which lead to our old habitation; a way never trodden by me without peculiar and home-like

feelings, full of the recollections, the pains and pleasures, of other days. But we are not to talk sentiment now—even May would not understand that maudlin language. We must get on. What a wintry hedge-row this is for the eighteenth of April! Primrosy to be sure, abundantly spangled with those stars of the earth—but so bare, so leafless, so cold! The wind whistles through the brown boughs as in winter. Even the early elder shoots, which do make an approach to springiness, look brown, and the small leaves of the woodbine, which have also ventured to peep forth, are of a sad purple, frost-bitten, like a dairymaid's elbows on a snowy morning. The very birds, in the season of pairing and building, look chilly and uncomfortable, and their nests!——"Oh, Saladin! come away from the hedge! Don't you see that what puzzles you and makes you leap up in the air is a redbreast's nest? Don't you see the pretty speckled eggs? Don't you hear the poor hen calling as it were for help? Come here this moment, sir!" And by good luck Saladin (who for a paynim has tolerable qualities) comes, before he has touched the nest, or before his playmate, the brindle, the less manageable of the two, has espied it.

Now we go round the corner and cross the bridge, where the common, with its clear stream winding between clumps of elms, assumes so park-like an appearance. Who is this approaching so slowly and majestically, this square bundle of petticoat and cloak, this road-waggon of a woman? It is, it must be Mrs. Sally Mearing, the completest specimen within my knowledge of farmeresses (may I be allowed that innovation in language?) as they were. It can be nobody else.

Mrs. Sally Mearing, when I first became acquainted with her, occupied, together with her father (a superannuated man of ninety), a large farm very near our former habitation. It had been anciently a great manor-farm or court-house, and was still a stately, substantial building, whose lofty halls and spacious chambers gave an air of grandeur to the common offices to which they were applied. Traces of gilding might yet be seen on the panels which covered the walls, and on the huge carved chimney-pieces which rose almost to the ceilings; and the marble tables and the inlaid oak staircase still spoke of the former grandeur of the court. Mrs. Sally corresponded well with the date of her mansion, although she troubled herself little with its dignity. She was thoroughly of the old school, and had a most comfortable contempt for the new; rose at four in winter and summer, breakfasted at six, dined at eleven in the forenoon, supped at five, and was regularly in bed before eight, except when the hay-time or the harvest imperiously required her to sit up till sunset—a necessity to which she submitted with no very good grace. To a deviation from these hours, and to the modern iniquities of white aprons, cotton stockings, and muslin handkerchiefs (Mrs Sally herself always wore check, black worsted, and a sort of yellow compound which she was wont to call *susy*), together with the invention of drill plough and thrashing machines, and other agricultural novelties, she failed not to attribute all the mishaps or misdoings of the whole parish. The last-mentioned discovery especially aroused her indignation. Oh, to hear her descant on the merits of the flail, wielded by a stout right arm, such as she had known in her youth

(for by her account there was as great a deterioration in bones and sinews as in the other implements of husbandry), was enough to make the very inventor break his machine. She would even take up her favourite instrument, and thrash the air herself by way of illustrating her argument, and, to say truth, few men in these degenerate days could have matched the stout, brawny, muscular limb which Mrs. Sally displayed at sixty-five.

In spite of this contumacious rejection of agricultural improvements, the world went well with her at Court Farm. A good landlord, an easy rent, incessant labour, unremitting frugality, and excellent times, insured a regular though moderate profit; and she lived on, grumbling and prospering, flourishing and complaining, till two misfortunes befell her at once—her father died and her lease expired. The loss of her father, although a bedridden man, turned off ninety, who could not in the course of nature have been expected to live long, was a terrible shock to a daughter, who was not so much younger as to be without fears for her own life, and who had, besides, been so used to nursing the good old man, and looking to his little comforts, that she missed him as a mother would miss an ailing child. The expiration of the lease was a grievance and a puzzle of a different nature. Her landlord would have willingly retained his excellent tenant, but not on the terms on which she then held the land, which had not varied for fifty years; so that poor Mrs. Sally had the misfortune to find rent rising and prices sinking both at the same moment—a terrible solecism in political economy. Even this, however, I believe she would have endured rather than have quitted the house where she was

born, and to which all her ways and notions were adapted, had not a priggish steward, as much addicted to improvement and reform as she was to precedent and established usages, insisted on binding her by lease to spread a certain number of loads of chalk on every field. This tremendous innovation, for never had that novelty in manure whitened the crofts and pightles of Court Farm, decided her at once. She threw the proposals into the fire, and left the place in a week.

Her choice of a habitation occasioned some wonder, and much amusement in our village world. To be sure, upon the verge of seventy, an old maid may be permitted to dispense with the more rigid punctilio of her class, but Mrs. Sally had always been so tenacious on the score of character, so very a prude, so determined an avoider of the "men folk" (as she was wont contemptuously to call them), that we all were conscious of something like astonishment on finding that she and her little handmaid had taken up their abode in one end of a spacious farm-house belonging to the bluff old bachelor, George Robinson, of the Lea. Now farmer Robinson was quite as notorious for his aversion to petticoated things as Mrs. Sally for her hatred to the unfeathered bipeds who wear doublet and hose, so that there was a little astonishment in that quarter too, and plenty of jests, which the honest farmer speedily silenced, by telling all who joked on the subject that he had given his lodger fair warning, that, let the people say what they would, he was quite determined not to marry her; so that if she had any views that way, it would be better for her to go elsewhere. This declaration, which must be admitted to have been more remarkable for frankness than civility, made, however, no ill impression on Mrs. Sally. To

the farmer's she went, and at his house she lives still, with her little maid, her tabby cat, a decrepit sheep-dog, and much of the lumber of Court Farm, which she could not find in her heart to part from. There she follows her old ways and her old hours, untempted by matrimony, and unassailed (as far as I hear) by love or by scandal, with no other grievance than an occasional dearth of employment for herself and her young lass (even pewter dishes do not always want scouring), and now and then a twinge of the rheumatism.

Here she is, that good relique of the olden time—for, in spite of her whims and prejudices, a better and a kinder woman never lived—here she is, with the hood of her red cloak pulled over her close black bonnet, of that silk which once (it may be presumed) was fashionable, since it is still called *mode*, and her whole stout figure huddled up in a miscellaneous and most substantial covering of thick petticoats, gowns aprons, shawls, and cloaks—a weight which it requires the strength of a thrasher to walk under—here she is, with her square, honest visage, and her loud, frank voice—and we hold a pleasant, disjointed chat of rheumatisms and early chickens, bad weather and hats with feathers in them;—the last exceedingly sore subject being introduced by poor Jane Davis (a cousin of Mrs. Sally), who, passing us in a beaver bonnet, on her road from school, stopped to drop her little curtsy, and was soundly scolded for her civility. Jane, who is a gentle, humble, smiling lass, about twelve years old, receives so many rebukes from her worthy relative, and bears them so meekly, that I should not wonder if they were to be followed by a legacy: I sincerely wish they may. Well, at last we

said good-bye; when, on inquiring my destination, and hearing that I was bent to the ten-acre copse (part of the farm which she ruled so long), she stopped me to tell a dismal story of two sheep-stealers who, sixty years ago, were found hidden in that copse, and only taken after great difficulty and resistance, and the maiming of a peace-officer. "Pray don't go there, Miss! For mercy's sake don't be so venturesome! Think if they should kill you!" were the last words of Mrs. Sally.

Many thanks for her care and kindness! But, without being at all fool-hardy in general, I have no great fear of the sheep-stealers of sixty years ago. Even if they escaped hanging for that exploit, I should greatly doubt their being in case to attempt another. So on we go; down the short, shady lane, and out on the pretty retired green, shut in by fields and hedge-rows, which we must cross to reach the copse. How lively this green nook is to-day, half covered with cows, and horses, and sheep! And how glad these frolicsome greyhounds are to exchange the hard gravel of the high road for this pleasant, short turf, which seems made for their gambols! How beautiful they are at play, chasing each other round and round in lessening circles, darting off at all kinds of angles, crossing and recrossing May, and trying to win her sedateness into a game at romps, turning round on each other with gay defiance, pursuing the cows and the colts, leaping up as if to catch the crows in their flight—all in their harmless and innocent——"Ah, wretches! villains! rascals! four-footed mischiefs! canine plagues! Saladin! Brindle!" They are after the sheep—"Saladin, I say!"—They have actually singled out that pretty spotted lamb—

"Brutes, if I catch you! Saladin! Brindle!" We shall be taken up for sheep-stealing presently ourselves. They have chased the poor little lamb into a ditch, and are mounting guard over it, standing at bay. "Ah, wretches, I have you now! for shame, Saladin! Get away, Brindle! See how good May is. Off with you, brutes! For shame! For shame!" and brandishing a handkerchief, which could hardly be an efficient instrument of correction, I succeeded in driving away the two puppies, who after all meant nothing more than play, although it was somewhat rough, and rather too much in the style of the old fable of the boys and the frogs. May is gone after them, perhaps to scold them; for she has been as grave as a judge during the whole proceeding, keeping ostentatiously close to me, and taking no part whatever in the mischief.

The poor little pretty lamb! here it lies on the bank quite motionless, frightened I believe to death, for certainly those villains never touched it. It does not stir. Does it breathe? Oh, yes, it does! It is alive, safe enough. Look, it opens its eyes, and, finding the coast clear and its enemies far away, it springs up in a moment and gallops to its dam, who has stood bleating the whole time at a most respectful distance. Who would suspect a lamb of so much simple cunning? I really thought the pretty thing was dead—and now how glad the ewe is to recover her curling spotted little one! How fluttered they look! Well! this adventure has flurried me too; between fright and running, I warrant you my heart beats as fast as the lamb's.

Ah! here is the shameless villain, Saladin, the cause of the commotion, thrusting his slender nose

into my hand to beg pardon and make up! "Oh, wickedest of soldans! Most iniquitous pagan! Soul of a Turk!"—but there is no resisting the good-humoured creature's penitence. I must pat him. "There! there! Now we will go to the copse; I am sure we shall find no worse malefactors than ourselves —shall we, May?—and the sooner we get out of sight of the sheep the better; for Brindle seems meditating another attack. *Allons, messieurs*, over this gate, across this meadow, and here is the copse."

How boldly that superb ash-tree, with its fine silver bark, rises from the bank, and what a fine entrance it makes with the holly beside it, which also deserves to be called a tree! But here we are in the copse. Ah! only one-half of the underwood was cut last year, and the other is at its full growth; hazel, briar, woodbine, bramble, forming one impenetrable thicket, and almost uniting with the lower branches of the elms, and oaks, and beeches, which rise at regular distances overhead. No foot can penetrate that dense and thorny entanglement; but there is a walk all round by the side of the wide sloping bank, walk and bank and copse carpeted with primroses, whose fresh and balmy odour impregnates the very air. Oh, how exquisitely beautiful; and it is not the primroses only, those gems of flowers, but the natural mosaic of which they form a part: that net-work of ground ivy with its lilac blossoms and the subdued tint of its purplish leaves, those rich mosses, those enamelled wild hyacinths, those spotted arums, and above all, those wreaths of ivy linking all those flowers together with chains of leaves more beautiful than blossoms, whose white veins seem swelling amidst the deep green or splendid brown—it is the whole earth that is so

beautiful! Never surely were primroses so richly set, and never did primroses better deserve such a setting. There they are of their own lovely yellow, the hue to which they have given a name, the exact tint of the butterfly that overhangs them (the first I have seen this year! can spring really be coming at last?)—sprinkled here and there with tufts of a reddish purple, and others of the purest white, as some accident of soil affects that strange and inscrutable operation of nature, the colouring of flowers. Oh, how fragrant they are, and how pleasant it is to sit in this sheltered copse, listening to the fine creaking of the wind among the branches, the most unearthly of sounds, with this gay tapestry under our feet, and the wood-pigeons flitting from tree to tree, and mixing the deep note of love with the elemental music.

Yes! spring is coming. Wood-pigeons, butterflies, and sweet flowers, all give tokens of the sweetest of the seasons. Spring is coming. The hazel stalks are swelling and putting forth their pale tassels, the satin palms with their honeyed odours are out on the willow, and the last lingering winter berries are dropping from the hawthorn, and making way for the bright and blossomy leaves.

THE WOOD.

APRIL 20th.—Spring is actually come now, with the fulness and almost the suddenness of a northern summer. To-day is completely April—clouds and sunshine, wind and showers; blossoms on the trees, grass in the fields, swallows by the ponds, snakes in the hedgerows, nightingales in the thickets, and cuckoos everywhere. My young friend Ellen G. is going with me this evening to gather wood-sorrel. She never saw that most elegant plant, and is so delicate an artist that the introduction will be a mutual benefit; Ellen will gain a subject worthy of her pencil, and the pretty weed will live—no small favour to a flower almost as transitory as the gum cistus; duration is the only charm which it wants, and that Ellen will give it. The weather is, to be sure, a little threatening, but we are not people to mind the weather when we have an object in view; we shall certainly go in quest of the wood-sorrel, and will take May, provided we can escape May's followers; for since the adventure of the lamb, Saladin has had an affair with a gander, furious in defence of his goslings, in which rencontre the gander came off conqueror; and as geese abound in the wood to which we are going (called by the country people the Pinge), and the victory may not always incline to the right side, I should be very sorry

to lead the soldan to fight his battles over again. We will take nobody but May.

So saying, we proceeded on our way through winding lanes, between hedge-rows tenderly green, till we reached the hatch-gate, with the white cottage beside it, embosomed in fruit trees, which forms the entrance to the Pinge, and in a moment the whole scene was before our eyes.

"Is not this beautiful, Ellen?" The answer could hardly be other than a glowing, rapid, "Yes!" A wood is generally a pretty place; but this wood—imagine a smaller forest, full of glades and sheep-walks, surrounded by irregular cottages with their blooming orchards, a clear stream winding about the brakes, and a road intersecting it, and giving life and light to the picture; and you will have a faint idea of the Pinge. Every step was opening a new point of view, a fresh combination of glade, and path, and thicket. The accessories, too, were changing every moment. Ducks, geese, pigs, and children, giving way, as we advanced into the wood, to sheep and forest ponies; and they again disappearing as we became more entangled in its mazes, till we heard nothing but the song of the nightingale, and saw only the silent flowers.

What a piece of fairy-land! The tall elms overhead just bursting into tender, vivid leaf, with here and there a hoary oak, or a silver-barked beech, every twig swelling with the brown buds, and yet not quite stripped of the tawny foliage of autumn; tall hollies and hawthorn beneath, with their crisp, brilliant leaves, mixed with the white blossoms of the sloe, and woven together with garlands of woodbines and wild-briers—what a fairy-land!

Primroses, cowslips, pansies, and the regular open-eyed white blossom of the wood anemone (or to use the more elegant Hampshire name, the windflower), were set under our feet as thick as daisies in a meadow; but the pretty weed that we came to seek was coyer; and Ellen began to fear that we had mistaken the place or the season. At last she had herself the pleasure of finding it under a brake of holly—"Oh, look! look! I am sure that this is the wood-sorrel! Look at the pendent white flower, shaped like a snow-drop, and veined with purple streaks, and the beautiful trefoil leaves folded like a heart—some, the young ones, so vividly, yet tenderly green, that the foliage of the elm and the hawthorn would show dully at their side—others of a deeper tint, and lined, as it were, with a rich and changeful purple!—Don't you see them?" pursued my dear young friend, who is a delightful piece of life and sunshine, and was half inclined to scold me for the calmness with which, amused by her enthusiasm, I stood listening to her ardent exclamations—"Don't you see them? Oh, how beautiful! and in what quantity! what profusion! See how the dark shade of the holly sets off the light and delicate colouring of the flower!—And see that other bed of them springing from the rich moss in the roots of that old beech tree! Pray let us gather some. Here are baskets." So, quickly and carefully we began gathering leaves, blossoms, roots and all, for the plant is so fragile that it will not brook separation—quickly and carefully we gathered, encountering divers petty misfortunes in spite of all our care, now caught by the veil in a holly bush, now hitching our shawls in a bramble, still gathering on, in spite of scratched fingers, till we had

nearly filled our baskets and began to talk of our departure.

"But where is May? May! May! No going home without her. May! Here she comes galloping, the beauty!"—(Ellen is almost as fond of May as I am.) "What has she got in her mouth? that rough, round, brown substance which she touches so tenderly? What can it be? A bird's nest? Naughty May!"

"No! as I live, a hedgehog! Look, Ellen, how it has coiled itself into a thorny ball! Off with it, May! Don't bring it to me!"——And May, somewhat reluctant to part with her prickly prize, however troublesome of carriage, whose change of shape seemed to me to have puzzled her sagacity more than any event I ever witnessed, for in general she has perfectly the air of understanding all that is going forward—May, at last, dropt the hedgehog; continuing, however, to pat it with her delicate, cat-like paw, cautious and daintily applied, and caught back suddenly and rapidly after every touch, as if her poor captive had been a red-hot coal. Finding that these pats entirely failed in solving the riddle (for the hedgehog shammed dead, like the lamb the other day, and appeared entirely motionless), she gave him so spirited a nudge with her pretty black nose, that she not only turned him over, but sent him rolling some little way along the turfy path—an operation which that sagacious quadruped endured with the most perfect passiveness, the most admirable nonresistance. No wonder that May's discernment was at fault. I myself, if I had not been aware of the trick, should have said that the ugly rough thing which she was trundling along, like a bowl or a cricket-ball, was an inanimate substance, something devoid of sensation

and of will. At last my poor pet, thoroughly perplexed and tired out, fairly relinquished the contest, and came slowly away, turning back once or twice to look at the object of her curiosity, as if half inclined to return and try the event of another shove. The sudden flight of a wood-pigeon effectually diverted her attention; and Ellen amused herself by fancying how the hedgehog was scuttling away, till our notice was also attracted by a very different object.

We had nearly threaded the wood, and were approaching an open grove of magnificent oaks on the other side, when sounds other than of nightingales burst on our ear, the deep and frequent strokes of the woodman's axe, and emerging from the Pinge we saw the havoc which that axe had committed. Above twenty of the finest trees lay stretched on the velvet turf. There they lay in every shape and form of devastation: some bare trunks, stripped ready for the timber carriage, with the bark built up in long piles at the side; some with the spoilers busy about them, stripping, hacking, hewing; others with their noble branches, their brown and fragrant shoots, all fresh as if they were alive—majestic corses, the slain of to-day. The grove was like a field of battle. The young lads who were stripping the bark, the very children who were picking up the chips, seemed awed and silent, as if conscious that death was around them. The nightingales sang faintly and interruptedly—a few low frightened notes like a requiem.

Ah! here we are at the very scene of murder, the very tree that they are felling; they have just hewn round the trunk with those slaughtering axes, and are about to saw it asunder. After all, it is a fine and thrilling operation, as the work of death usually is.

Into how grand an attitude was that young man thrown as he gave the final strokes round the root; and how wonderful is the effect of that supple and apparently powerless saw, bending like a riband, and yet overmastering that giant of the woods, conquering and overthrowing that thing of life! Now it has passed half through the trunk, and the woodman has begun to calculate which way the tree will fall; he drives a wedge to direct its course; now a few more movements of the noiseless saw, and then a larger wedge. See how the branches tremble! Hark, how the trunk begins to crack! Another stroke of the huge hammer on the wedge, and the tree quivers, as with a mortal agony, shakes, reels, and falls. How slow, and solemn, and awful it is! How like to death, to human death in its grandest form! Cæsar in the Capitol, Seneca in the bath, could not fall more sublimely than that oak.

Even the heavens seem to sympathise with the devastation. The clouds have gathered into one thick, low canopy, dark and vapoury as the smoke which overhangs London; the setting sun is just gleaming underneath with a dim and bloody glare, and the crimson rays spreading upward with a lurid and portentous grandeur, a subdued and dusky glow, like the light reflected on the sky from some vast conflagration. The deep flush fades away, and the rain begins to descend; and we hurry homeward rapidly, yet sadly, forgetful alike of the flowers, the hedgehog, and the wetting, thinking and talking only of the fallen tree.

THE DELL.

MAY 2d.—A delicious evening; bright sunshine; light summer air; a sky almost cloudless; and a fresh yet delicate verdure on the hedges and in the fields; an evening that seems made for a visit to my newly-discovered haunt, the mossy dell, one of the most beautiful spots in the neighbourhood, which, after passing, times out of number, the field which it terminates, we found out about two months ago from the accident of May's killing a rabbit there. May has had a fancy for the place ever since; and so have I.

Thither accordingly we bend our way—through the village—up the hill—along the common—past the avenue—across the bridge; and by the hill. How deserted the road is to-night! We have not seen a single acquaintance, except poor blind Robert, laden with his sack of grass plucked from the hedges, and the little boy that leads him. A singular division of labour! Little Jem guides Robert to the spots where the long grass grows, and tells him where it is most plentiful; and then the old man cuts it close to the roots, and between them they fill the sack, and sell the contents in the village. Half the cows in the street—for our baker, our wheel-wright, and our shoemaker has each his Alderney—owe the best part of their maintenance to blind Robert's industry.

Here we are at the entrance of the cornfield which leads to the dell, and which commands so fine a view of the Loddon, the mill, the great farm, with its picturesque outbuildings, and the range of woody hills beyond. It is impossible not to pause a moment at that gate, the landscape, always beautiful, is so suited to the season and the hour—so bright, and gay, and spring-like. But May, who has the chance of another rabbit in her pretty head, has galloped forward to the dingle, and poor May, who follows me so faithfully in all my wanderings, has a right to a little indulgence in hers. So to the dingle we go.

At the end of the field, which, when seen from the road, seems terminated by a thick, dark coppice, we come suddenly to the edge of a ravine, on one side fringed with a low growth of alder, birch, and willow, on the other mossy, turfy, and bare, or only broken by bright tufts of blossomed broom. One or two old pollards almost conceal the winding road that leads down the descent, by the side of which a spring as bright as crystal runs gurgling along. The dell itself is an irregular piece of broken ground, in some parts very deep, intersected by two or three high banks of equal irregularity, now abrupt and bare, and rock-like, now crowned with tufts of the feathery willow or magnificent old thorns. Everywhere the earth is covered by short, fine turf, mixed with mosses, soft, beautiful, and various, and embossed with the speckled leaves and lilac flowers of the arum, the paler blossoms of the common orchis, the enamelled blue of the wild hyacinth, so splendid in this evening light, and large tufts of oxslips and cowslips rising like nosegays from the short turf.

The ground on the other side of the dell is much

lower than the field through which we came, so that it is mainly to the labyrinthine intricacy of these high banks that it owes its singular character of wildness and variety. Now we seem hemmed in by those green cliffs, shut out from all the world, with nothing visible but those verdant mounds and the deep blue sky; now by some sudden turn we get a peep at an adjoining meadow, where the sheep are lying, dappling its sloping surface like the small clouds on the summer heaven. Poor harmless, quiet creatures, how still they are! Some socially lying side by side; some grouped in threes and fours; some quite apart. Ah! there are lambs amongst them—pretty, pretty lambs—nestled in by their mothers. Soft, quiet, sleepy things! Not all so quiet, though! There is a party of these young lambs as wide-awake as heart can desire; half-a-dozen of them playing together, frisking, dancing, leaping, butting, and crying in the young voice, which is so pretty a diminutive of the full-grown bleat. How beautiful they are with their innocent spotted faces, their mottled feet, their long curly tails, and their light flexible forms, frolicing like so many kittens, but with a gentleness, an assurance of sweetness and innocence, which no kitten, nothing that ever is to be a cat, can have. How complete and perfect is their enjoyment of existence! Ah! little rogues! your play has been too noisy; you have awakened your mammas; and two or three of the old ewes are getting up; and one of them marching gravely to the troop of lambs has selected her own, given her a gentle butt, and trotted off; the poor rebuked lamb following meekly, but every now and then stopping and casting a longing look at its playmates; who, after a moment's awed pause, had resumed their

gambols; whilst the stately dame every now and then looked back in her turn, to see that her little one was following. At last she lay down, and the lamb by her side. I never saw so pretty a pastoral scene in my life.*

Another turning of the dell gives a glimpse of the dark coppice by which it is backed, and from which we are separated by some marshy, rushy ground, where the springs have formed into a pool, and where the moor-hen loves to build her nest. Ay, there is one scudding away now—I can hear her plash into the water, and the rustling of her wings amongst the rushes. This is the deepest part of the wild dingle How uneven the ground is! Surely these excavations, now so thoroughly clothed with vegetation,

* I have seen one which affected me much more. Walking in the Church-lane with one of the young ladies of the vicarage, we met a large flock of sheep, with the usual retinue of shepherds and dogs. Lingering after them and almost out of sight, we encountered a straggling ewe, now trotting along, now walking, and every now and then stopping to look back, and bleating. A little behind her came a lame lamb, bleating occasionally, as if in answer to its dam, and doing its very best to keep up with her. It was a lameness of both the fore feet; the knees were bent, and it seemed to walk on the very edge of the hoof—on tip-toe, if I may venture such an expression. My young friend thought that the lameness proceeded from original malformation; I am rather of opinion that it was accidental, and that the poor creature was wretchedly foot-sore. However that might be, the pain and difficulty with which it took every step were not to be mistaken; and the distress and fondness of the mother, her perplexity as the flock passed gradually out of sight, the effort with which the poor lamb contrived to keep up a sort of trot, and their mutual calls and lamentations, were really so affecting, that Ellen and I, although not at all lachrymose sort of people, had much ado not to cry. We could not find a boy to carry the lamb, which was too big for us to manage—but I was quite sure that the ewe would not desert it, and as the dark was coming on, we both trusted that the shepherds, on folding their flock, would miss them and return for them- and so I am happy to say it proved.

LITTLE JIM GUIDES ROBERT TO THE SPOTS WHERE THE LONG GRASS GROWS. –*Page* 53.

must originally have been huge gravel pits ; there is no other way of accounting for the labyrinth, for they do dig gravel in such capricious meanders ; but the quantity seems incredible. Well ! there is no end of guessing ! We are getting amongst the springs, and must turn back. Round this corner, where on ledges like fairy terraces the orchises and arums grow, and we emerge suddenly on a new side of the dell, just fronting the small homestead of our good neighbour, farmer Allen.

This rustic dwelling belongs to what used to be called in this part of the country "a little bargain;" thirty or forty acres, perhaps, of arable land, which the owner and his sons cultivated themselves, whilst the wife and daughters assisted in the husbandry, and eked out the slender earnings by the produce of the dairy, the poultry-yard, and the orchard—an order of cultivators now passing rapidly away, but in which much of the best part of the English character, its industry, its frugality, its sound sense, and its kindness might be found. Farmer Allen himself is an excellent specimen, the cheerful, venerable old man, with his long white hair, and his bright grey eye, and his wife is a still finer. They have had a hard struggle to win through the world and keep their little property undivided ; but good management and good principles, and the assistance afforded them by an admirable son, who left our village a poor 'prentice boy, and is now a partner in a great house in London, have enabled them to overcome all the difficulties of these trying times, and they are now enjoying the peaceful evenings of a well-spent life as free from care and anxiety as their best friends could desire.

Ah ! there is Mr. Allen in the orchard, the beautiful

orchard, with its glorious gardens of pink and white, its pearly pear-blossoms and coral apple-buds. What a flush of bloom it is! how brightly delicate it appears, thrown into strong relief by the dark house and the weather-stained barn, in this soft evening light! The very grass is strewed with the snowy petals of the pear and the cherry. And there sits Mrs. Allen, feeding her poultry, with her three little grand-daughters from London, pretty fairies, from three years old to five (only two-and-twenty months elapsed between the birth of the eldest and the youngest), playing round her feet.

Mrs. Allen, my dear Mrs. Allen, has been that rare thing, a beauty; and although she be now an old woman, I had almost said that she is so still. Why should I not say so? Nobleness of feature and sweetness of expression are surely as delightful in age as in youth. Her face and figure are much like those which are stamped indelibly on the memory of every one who ever saw that grand specimen of woman—Mrs. Siddons. The outline of Mrs. Allen's face is exactly the same; but there is more softness, more gentleness, a more feminine composure in the eye and in the smile. Mrs. Allen never played Lady Macbeth. Her hair, almost as black as at twenty, is parted on her large, fair forehead, and combed under her exquisitely neat and snowy cap; a muslin neckerchief, a grey stuff gown, and a white apron complete the picture.

There she sits under an old elder tree which flings its branches over her like a canopy, whilst the setting sun illumines her venerable figure, and touches the leaves with an emerald light; there she sits, placid and smiling, with her spectacles in her hand and a

measure of barley on her lap, into which the little girls are dipping their chubby hands and scattering the corn amongst the ducks and chickens with unspeakable glee. But those ingrates, the poultry, don't seem so pleased and thankful as they ought to be ; they mistrust their young feeders. All domestic animals dislike children, partly from an instinctive fear of their tricks and their thoughtlessness ; partly, I suspect, from jealousy. Jealousy seems a strange tragic passion to attribute to the inmates of the *basse cour*, —but only look at that strutting fellow of a bantam cock (evidently a favourite), who sidles up to his old mistress with an air half affronted and half tender, turning so scornfully from the barley-corns which Annie is flinging towards him, and say if he be not as jealous as Othello? Nothing can pacify him but Mrs. Allen's notice and a dole from her hand. See, she is calling to him and feeding him, and now how he swells out his feathers, and flutters his wings, and erects his glossy neck, and struts and crows and pecks, proudest and happiest of bantams, the pet and glory of the poultry-yard!

In the meantime my own pet, May, who has all this while been peeping into every hole, and penetrating every nook and winding of the dell, in hopes of finding another rabbit, has returned to my side, and is sliding her snake-like head into my hand, at once to invite the caress which she likes so well, and to intimate, with all due respect, that it is time to go home. The setting sun gives the same warning ; and in a moment we are through the dell, the field, and the gate, past the farm and the mill, and hanging over the bridge that crosses the Loddon river.

What a sunset! how golden! how beautiful! The

sun just disappearing, and the narrow liny clouds, which a few minutes ago lay like soft vapoury streaks along the horizon, lightened up with a golden splendour that the eye can scarcely endure, and those still softer clouds which floated above them wreathing and curling into a thousand fantastic forms, as thin and changeful as summer smoke, now defined and deepened into grandeur, and edged with ineffable, insufferable light! Another minute and the brilliant orb totally disappears, and the sky above grows every moment more varied and more beautiful as the dazzling golden lines are mixed with glowing red and gorgeous purple, dappled with small, dark specks, and mingled with such a blue as the egg of the hedge-sparrow. To look up at that glorious sky, and then to see that magnificent picture reflected in the clear and lovely Loddon water, is a pleasure never to be described and never forgotten. My heart swells and my eyes fill as I write of it, and think of the immeasurable majesty of nature, and the unspeakable goodness of God, who has spread an enjoyment so pure, so peaceful, and so intense before the meanest and the lowliest of His creatures.

THE COWSLIP-BALL.

MAY 16th.—There are moments in life when, without any visible or immediate cause, the spirits sink and fail, as it were, under the mere pressure of existence; moments of unaccountable depression, when one is weary of one's very thoughts, haunted by images that will not depart—images many and various, but all painful; friends lost, or changed, or dead; hope disappointed even in their accomplishment; fruitless regrets, powerless wishes, doubt and fear, and self-distrust and self-disapprobation. They who have known these feelings (and who is there so happy as not to have known some of them?) will understand why Alfieri became powerless and Froissart dull; and why even needlework, the most effectual sedative, that grand soother and composer of woman's distress, fails to comfort me to-day. I will go out into the air this cool pleasant afternoon, and try what that will do. I fancy that exercise, or exertion of any kind, is the true specific for nervousness. "Fling but a stone, the giant dies." I will go to the meadows, the beautiful meadows! and I will have my materials of happiness, Lizzy and May, and a basket for flowers, and we will make a cowslip-ball. "Did you ever see a cowslip-ball, my Lizzy?" "No." "Come away, then; make haste! run Lizzy!"

And on we go, fast, fast! down the road, across the lea, past the workhouse, along by the great pond, till we slide into the deep, narrow lane, whose hedges seem to meet over the water, and win our way to the little farm-house at the end. "Through the farm-yard, Lizzy; over the gate; never mind the cows; they are quiet enough."—"I don't mind 'em," said Miss Lizzy, boldly and truly, and with a proud, affronted air, displeased at being thought to mind anything, and showing by her attitude and manner some design of proving her courage by an attack on the largest of the herd, in the shape of a pull by the tail. "I don't mind 'em."—"I know you don't, Lizzy; but let them alone, and don't chase the turkey-cock. Come to me, my dear!" and, for a wonder, Lizzy came.

In the meantime, my other pet, Mayflower, had also gotten into a scrape. She had driven about a huge, unwieldly sow, till the animal's grunting had disturbed the repose of a still more enormous Newfoundland dog, the guardian of the yard. Out he sallied, growling, from the depth of his kennel, erecting his tail, and shaking his long chain. May's attention was instantly diverted from the sow to this new playmate, friend or foe, she cared not which; and he of the kennel, seeing his charge unhurt, and out of danger, was at leisure to observe the charms of his fair enemy, as she frolicked around him, always beyond the reach of his chain, yet always, with the natural instinctive coquetry of her sex, alluring him to the pursuit which she know to be vain. I never saw a prettier flirtation. At last the noble animal, wearied out, retired to the inmost recesses of his habitation, and would not even approach her when she stood right before the entrance. "You are properly served, May. Come along, Lizzy.

Across this wheat-field, and now over the gate. Stop! let me lift you down. No jumping, no breaking of necks, Lizzy!" And here we are in the meadows, and out of the world. Robinson Crusoe in his lonely island had scarcely a more complete or a more beautiful solitude.

These meadows consist of a double row of small enclosures of rich grass-land, a mile or two in length, sloping down from high arable grounds on either side, to a little nameless brook that winds between them with a course which, in its infinite variety, clearness, and rapidity, seems to emulate the bold rivers of the north, of whom, far more than of our lazy southern streams, our rivulet presents a miniature likeness. Never was water more exquisitely tricksy—now darting over the bright pebbles, sparkling and flashing in the light with a bubbling music, as sweet and wild as the song of the woodlark; now stretching quietly along, giving back the rich tufts of the golden marsh-marigolds which grow on its margin; now sweeping round a fine reach of green grass, rising steeply into a high mount, a mimic promontory, whilst the other side sinks softly away, like some tiny bay, and the water flows between, so clear, so wide, so shallow, that Lizzy, longing for adventure, is sure she could cross unwetted; now dashing through two sand-banks, a torrent deep and narrow, which May clears at a bound; now sleeping, half hidden, beneath the alders, hawthorns, and wild roses, with which the banks are so profusely and variously fringed, whilst flags,* lilies, and other aquatic

* Walking along these meadows one bright sunny afternoon, a year or two back, and rather later in the season, I had an opportunity of noticing a curious circumstance in natural history. Standing close to the edge of the stream, I remarked a singular appearance on a large tuft of flags. It looked like bunches of

plants, almost cover the surface of the stream. In good truth, it is a beautiful brook, and one that Walton himself might have sitten by and loved, for trout are there; we see them as they dart up the stream, and hear and start at the sudden plunge when they spring to the surface for the summer flies. Izaak Walton would have loved our brook and our quiet meadows; they breathe the very spirit of his own peacefulness, a soothing quietude that sinks into the soul. There is no path through them, not one; we might wander a whole spring day and not see a trace of human habitation. They belong to a number of small proprietors, who allow each other access through their respective grounds from pure kindness and neighbourly feeling; a privilege never abused; and the fields on the other side of the water are reached by a rough plank, or a tree thrown across, or some such homely bridge. We ourselves possess one of the most beautiful; so that the strange pleasure of property, that instinct which makes Lizzy delight in her broken doll, and May in the bare bone which she has pilfered from the kennel of her recreant admirer of Newfoundland, is added to the other charms of this enchanting scenery; a strange pleasure it is, when one so poor as I can feel it! Perhaps it is felt most by the poor, with the rich it may be less intense—too

flowers, the leaves of which seemed dark, yet transparent, intermingled with brilliant tubes of bright blue or shining green. On examining this phenomenon more closely, it turned out to be several clusters of dragon-flies, just emerged from their deformed chrysalis state, and still torpid and motionless from the wetness of their filmy wings. Half-an-hour later we returned to the spot and they were gone. We had seen them at the very moment when beauty was complete and animation dormant. I have since found nearly a similar account of this curious process in Mr. Bingley's entertaining work, called *Animal Biography*.

much diffused and spread out, becoming thin by expansion, like leaf-gold ; the little of the poor may be not only more precious, but more pleasant to them ; certain that bit of grassy and blossomy earth, with its green knolls and tufted bushes, its old pollards wreathed with ivy, and its bright and babbling waters, is very dear to me. But I must always have loved these meadows, so fresh, and cool, and delicious to the eye and to the tread, full of cowslips, and of all vernal flowers : Shakespeare's song of spring bursts irrepressibly from our lips as we step on them—

> "When daisies pied, and violets blue,
> And lady-smocks all silver white,
> And cuckoo-buds of yellow hue,
> Do paint the meadows with delight,
> The cuckoo then on every tree——"

"Cuckoo ! cuckoo !" cried Lizzy, breaking in with her clear, childish voice ; and immediately, as if at her call, the real bird, from a neighbouring tree (for these meadows are dotted with timber like a park), began to echo my lovely little girl, "Cuckoo ! cuckoo !" I have a prejudice very unpastoral and unpoetical (but I cannot help it, I have many such) against this "harbinger of spring." His note is so monotonous, so melancholy ; and then the boys mimic him ; one hears "Cuckoo ! cuckoo !" in dirty streets, amongst smoky houses, and the bird is hated for faults not his own. But prejudices of taste, likings, and dislikings, are not always vanquishable by reason ; so, to escape the serenade from the tree, which promised to be of considerable duration (when once that eternal song begins, on it goes ticking like a clock)—to escape that noise, I determined to excite another, and challenged Lizzy to a cowslip-gathering ; a trial of skill and

speed, to see which should soonest fill her basket. My stratagem succeeded completely. What scrambling, what shouting, what glee from Lizzy! twenty cuckoos might have sung unheard whilst she was pulling her own flowers, and stealing mine, and laughing, screaming, and talking through all.

At last the baskets were filled, and Lizzy declared victor; and down we sat, on the brink of the stream, under a spreading hawthorn, just disclosing its own pearly buds, and surrounded with the rich and enamelled flowers of the wild hyacinth, blue and white, to make our cowslip-ball. Everyone knows the process: to nip off the tuft of flowerets just below the top of the stalk, and hang each cluster nicely balanced across a riband, till you have a long string like a garland; then to press them closely together, and tie them tightly up. We went on very prosperously, *considering*—as people say of a young lady's drawing, or a Frenchman's English, or a woman's tragedy, or of the poor little dwarf who works without fingers, or the ingenious sailor who writes with his toes, or generally of any performance which is accomplished by means seemingly inadequate to its production. To be sure we met with a few accidents. First, Lizzy spoiled nearly all her cowslips by snapping them off too short; so there was a fresh gathering; in the next place, May overset my full basket, and sent the blossoms floating, like so many fairy favours, down the brook; then, when we were going on pretty steadily, just as we had made a superb wreath, and were thinking of tying it together, Lizzy, who held the riband, caught a glimpse of a gorgeous butterfly, all brown and red and purple, and skipping off to pursue the new object,

let go her hold; so all our treasures were abroad again. At last, however, by dint of taking a branch of alder as a substitute for Lizzy, and hanging the basket in a pollard-ash, out of sight of May, the cowslip-ball was finished. What a concentration of fragrance and beauty it was! golden and sweet to satiety! rich to sight, and touch, and smell! Lizzy was enchanted, and ran off with her prize, hiding amongst the trees in the very coyness of ecstasy, as if any human eye, even mine, would be a restraint on her innocent raptures.

In the meanwhile I sat listening, not to my enemy the cuckoo, but to a whole concert of nightingales, scarcely interrupted by any meaner bird, answering and vying with each other in those short, delicious strains which are to the ear as roses to the eye; those snatches of lovely sound which come across us as airs from heaven. Pleasant thoughts, delightful associations, awoke as I listened; and almost unconsciously I repeated to myself the beautiful story of the Lutist and the Nightingale, from Ford's *Lover's Melancholy*. Here it is. Is there in English poetry anything finer?

"Passing from Italy to Greece, the tales
Which poets of an elder time have feign'd
To glorify their Tempe, bred in me
Desire of visiting Paradise.
To Thessaly I came, and living private,
Without acquaintance of more sweet companions
Than the old inmates to my love, my thoughts,
I day by day frequented silent groves
And solitary walks. One morning early
This accident encounter'd me: I heard
The sweetest and most ravishing contention
That art and nature ever were at strife in.
A sound of music touch'd mine ears, or rather,
Indeed, entranced my soul; as I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute

With strains of strange variety and harmony
Proclaiming, as it seem'd, so bold a challenge
To the clear choristers of the woods, the birds,
That as they flock'd about him, all stood silent,
Wondering at what they heard. I wonder'd too.
A nightingale,
Nature's best skill'd musician, undertakes
The challenge ; and for every several strain
The well-shaped youth could touch, she sang him down.
He could not run divisions with more art
Upon his quaking instrument than she,
The Nightingale, did with her various notes
Reply to.
Some time thus spent, the young man grew at last
Into a pretty anger, that a bird,
Whom art had never taught cleffs, moods, or notes,
Should vie with him for mastery, whose study
Had busied many hours to perfect practice.
To end the controversy, in a rapture
Upon his instrument he plays so swiftly,
So many voluntaries, and so quick,
That there was curiosity and cunning,
Concord in discord, lines of different method
Meeting in one full centre of delight.
The bird (ordain'd to be
Music's first martyr, strove to imitate
These several sounds ; which, when her warbling throat
Fail'd in, for grief down dropt she on his lute,
And brake her heart. It was the quaintest sadness
To see the conqueror upon her hearse
To weep a funeral elegy of tears.
He looked upon the trophies of his art,
Then sigh'd, then wiped his eyes ; then sigh'd and cry'd,
'Alas! poor creature, I will soon revenge
This cruelty upon the author of it.
Henceforth this lute, guilty of innocent blood,
Shall never more betray a harmless piece
To an untimely end ;' and in that sorrow,
As he was pashing it against a tree,
I suddenly stept in."

When I had finished the recitation of this exquisite passage, the sky, which had been all the afternoon dull and heavy, began to look more and more threatening ; darker clouds, like wreaths of black smoke, flew across the dead leaden tint ; a cooler, damper air

blew over the meadows, and a few large, heavy drops splashed in the water. "We shall have a storm. Lizzy! May! where are ye? Quick, quick, my Lizzy! run, run! faster, faster!"

And off we ran; Lizzy not at all displeased at the thoughts of a wetting, to which, indeed, she is almost as familiar as a duck; May, on the other hand, peering up at the weather, and shaking her pretty ears with manifest dismay. Of all animals, next to a cat, a greyhound dreads rain. She might have escaped it; her light feet would have borne her home long before the shower; but May is too faithful for that, too true a comrade, understands too well the laws of good-fellowship; so she waited for us. She did, to be sure, gallop on before, and then stop and look back, and beckon, as it were, with some scorn in her black eyes at the slowness of our progress. We in the meanwhile got on as fast as we could, encouraging and reproaching each other. "Faster, my Lizzy! Oh, what a bad runner!"—"Faster, faster! Oh, what a bad runner!" echoed my sauce-box. "You are so fat, Lizzy, you make no way!"—"Ah! who else is fat?" retorted the darling. Certainly her mother is right; I do spoil that child.

By this time we were thoroughly soaked, all three. It was a pelting shower, that drove though our thin summer clothing, and poor May's short glossy coat, in a moment. And then, when we were wet to the skin, the sun came out, actually the sun, as if to laugh at our plight; and then, more provoking still, when the sun was shining, and the shower over, came a maid and a boy to look after us, loaded with cloaks and umbrellas enough to fence us against a whole day's rain. Never mind! on we go, faster and faster; Lizzy obliged to

be most ignobly carried, having had the misfortune to lose a shoe in the mud, which we left the boy to look after.

Here we are at home—dripping ; but glowing and laughing, and bearing our calamity most manfully. May, a dog of excellent sense, went instantly to bed in the stable, and is at this moment over head and ears in straw ; Lizzy is gone to bed too, coaxed into that wise measure by a promise of tea and toast, and of not going home till to-morrow, and the story of Little Red Riding Hood ; and I am enjoying the luxury of dry clothing by a good fire. Really, getting wet through now and then is no bad thing, finery apart ; for one should not like spoiling a new pelisse, or a handsome plume ; but when there is nothing in question but a white gown and a straw bonnet, as was the case to-day, it is rather pleasant than not. The little chill refreshes, and our enjoyment of the subsequent warmth and dryness is positive and absolute. Besides, the stimulus and exertion do good to the mind as well as body. How melancholy I was all the morning! how cheerful I am now! Nothing like a shower-bath—a real shower-bath, such as Lizzy and May and I have undergone, to cure low spirits. Try it, my dear readers, if ever ye be nervous—I will answer for its success.

THE OLD HOUSE AT ABERLEIGH.

JUNE 25th.—What a glowing glorious day! Summer in its richest prime, noon in its most sparkling brightness, little white clouds dappling the deep blue sky, and the sun, now partially veiled, and now bursting through them with an intensity of light! It would not do to walk to-day, professedly to walk—we should be frighened at the very sound! and yet it is probable that we may be beguiled into a pretty long stroll before we return home. We are going to drive to the old house at Aberleigh, to spend the morning under the shade of those balmy firs, and amongst those luxuriant rose trees, and by the side of that brimming Loddon river. "Do not expect us before six o'clock," said I, as I left the house; "Six at soonest!" added my charming companion; and off we drove in our little pony chaise, drawn by our old mare, and with the good-humoured urchin, Henry's successor, a sort of younger Scrub, who takes care of horse and chaise, and cow, and garden, for our charioteer.

My comrade in this homely equipage was a young lady of high family and high endowments, to whom the novelty of the thing, and her own naturalness of character and simplicity of taste, gave an unspeakable enjoyment. She danced the little chaise up and down

as she got into it, and laughed for very glee like a child. Lizzy herself could not have been more delighted. She praised the horse and the driver, and the roads and the scenery, and gave herself fully up to the enchantment of a rural excursion in the sweetest weather of this sweet season. I enjoyed all this too; for the road was pleasant to every sense, winding through narrow lanes, under high elms, and between hedges garlanded with woodbine and rose trees, whilst the air was scented with the delicious fragrance of blossomed beans. I enjoyed it all—but, I believe, my principal pleasure was derived from my companion herself.

Emily I. is a person whom it is a privilege to know. She is quite like a creation of the older poets, and might pass for one of Shakespeare's or Fletcher's women stepped into life; just as tender, as playful, as gentle, and as kind. She is clever too, and has all the knowledge and accomplishments that a carefully-conducted education, acting on a mind of singular clearness and ductility, matured and improved by the very best company, can bestow. But one never thinks of her acquirements. It is the charming artless character, the bewitching sweetness of manner, the real and universal sympathy, the quick taste and the ardent feeling, that one loves in Emily. She is Irish by birth, and has in perfection the melting voice and soft caressing accent by which her fair countrywomen are distinguished. Moreover, she is pretty—I think her beautiful, and so do all who have heard as well as seen her—but pretty, very pretty, all the world must confess; and perhaps that is a distinction more enviable, because less envied, than the "palmy state" of beauty. Her prettiness is of the prettiest kind—

that of which the chief character is youthfulness. A short but pleasing figure, all grace and symmetry, a fair blooming face, beaming with intelligence and good-humour; the prettiest little feet and the whitest hands in the world—such is Emily I.

She resides with her maternal grandmother, a venerable old lady, slightly shaken with the palsy; and when together (and they are so fondly attached to each other that they are seldom parted), it is one of the loveliest combinations of youth and age ever witnessed. There is no seeing them without feeling an increase of respect and affection for both grandmother and granddaughter—always one of the tenderest and most beautiful of natural connections—as Richardson knew when he made such exquisite use of it in his matchless book. I fancy that grandmamma Shirley must have been just such another venerable lady as Mrs. S., and our sweet Emily—Oh, no! Harriet Byron is not half good enough for her! There is nothing like her in the whole seven volumes.

But here we are at the bridge! Here we must alight! "This is the Loddon, Emily. Is it not a beautiful river? rising level with its banks, so clear, and smooth, and peaceful, giving back the verdant landscape and the bright blue sky, and bearing on its pellucid stream the snowy water-lily, the purest of flowers, which sits enthroned on its own cool leaves, looking chastity itself, like the lady in Comus. That queenly flower becomes the water, and so do the stately swans who are sailing so majestically down the stream, like those who—

> "'On St. Mary's lake
> Float double, swan and shadow.'"

We must dismount here, and leave Richard to take

care of our equipage under the shade of these trees, whilst we walk up to the house—See, there it is! We must cross this stile; there is no other way now."

And crossing the stile, we were immediately in what had been a drive round a spacious park, and still retained something of the character, though the park itself had long been broken into arable fields—and in full view of the Great House, a beautiful structure of James the First's time, whose glassless windows and dilapidated doors form a melancholy contrast with the strength and entireness of the rich and massive front.

The story of that ruin—for such it is—is always to me singularly affecting: It is that of the decay of an ancient and distinguished family, gradually reduced from the highest wealth and station to actual poverty. The house and park, and a small estate around it, were entailed on a distant cousin, and could not be alienated; and the late owner, the last of his name and lineage, after long struggling with debt and difficulty, farming his own lands, and clinging to his magnificent home with a love of place almost as tenacious as that of the younger Foscari, was at last forced to abandon it, retired to a paltry lodging in a paltry town, and died there about twenty years ago, broken-hearted. His successor, bound by no ties of association to the spot, and rightly judging the residence to be much too large for the diminished estate, immediately sold the superb fixtures, and would have entirely taken down the house, if, on making the attempt, the masonry had not been found so solid that the materials were not worth the labour. A great part, however, of one side is laid open, and

the splendid chambers, with their carving and gilding, are exposed to wind and rain—sad memorials of past grandeur! The grounds have been left in a merciful neglect; the park, indeed, is broken up, the lawn mown twice a-year like a common hay-field, the grotto mouldering into ruin, and the fish-ponds choked with rushes and aquatic plants; but the shrubs and flowering trees are undestroyed, and have grown into a magnificence of size and wildness of beauty, such as we may imagine them to attain in their native forests. Nothing can exceed their luxuriance, especially in the spring, when the lilac, and laburnum, and double-cherry put forth their gorgeous blossoms. There is a sweet sadness in the sight of such floweriness amidst such desolation; it seems the triumph of nature over the destructive power of man. The whole place, in that season more particularly, is full of a soft and soothing melancholy, reminding me, I scarcely know why, of some of the descriptions of natural scenery in the novels of Charlotte Smith, which I read when a girl, and which, perhaps, for that reason hang on my memory.

But here we are, in the smooth, grassy ride, on the top of a steep turfy slope descending to the river, crowned with enormous firs and limes of equal growth, looking across the winding waters into a sweet, peaceful landscape of quiet meadows, shut in by distant woods. What a fragrance is in the air from the balmy fir trees and the blossomed limes! What an intensity of odour! And what a murmur of bees in the lime trees! What a coil those little winged people make over our heads! And what a pleasant sound it is! the pleasantest of busy sounds, that which comes associated with all that is good and

beautiful—industry and forecast, and sunshine and flowers. Surely these lime trees might store a hundred hives; the very odour is of a honeyed richness, cloying, satiating.

Emily exclaimed in admiration as we stood under deep, strong, leafy shadow, and still more when honeysuckles trailed their profusion in our path, and roses, really trees, almost intercepted our passage.

"On, Emily! farther yet! Force your way by that jessamine—it will yield; I will take care of this stubborn white rose bough."—"Take care of yourself! Pray take care," said my fairest friend; "let me hold back the branches."—After we had won our way through the strait, at some expense of veils and flounces, she stopped to contemplate and admire the tall, graceful shrub, whose long, thorny stems, spreading in every direction, had opposed our progress, and now waved their delicate clusters over our heads. "Did I ever think," exclaimed she, "of standing under the shadow of a white rose tree! What an exquisite fragrance! And what a beautiful flower! so pale, and white, and tender, and the petals thin and smooth as silk! What rose is it?"—"Don't you know? Did you never see it before? It is rare now, I believe, and seems rarer than it is, because it only blossoms in very hot summers; but this, Emily, is the musk rose,—that very musk rose of which Titania talks, and which is worthy of Shakespeare and of her. Is it not?—No? do not smell it; it is less sweet so than other roses; but one cluster in a vase, or even that bunch in your bosom, will perfume a large room, as it does the summer air."—"Oh! we will take twenty clusters," said Emily—"I wish grandmamma were here! She talks so often of a musk rose tree that

grew against one end of her father's house. I wish she were here to see this!"

Echoing her wish, and well laden with musk roses, planted, perhaps, in the days of Shakespeare, we reached the steps that led to a square summer-house or banqueting-room, overhanging the river: the under part was a boat-house, whose projecting roof, as well as the walls and the very top of the little tower, was covered with ivy and woodbine, and surmounted by tufted barberries, bird cherries, acacias, covered with their snowy chains, and other pendant and flowering trees. Beyond rose two poplars of unrivalled magnitude, towering like stately columns over the dark tall firs, and giving a sort of pillared and architectural grandeur to the scene.

We were now close to the mansion; but it looked sad and desolate, and the entrance, choked with brambles and nettles, seemed almost to repel our steps. The beautiful summer-house was free, and open, and inviting, commanding from the unglazed windows, which hung high above the water, a reach of the river terminated by a rustic mill.

There we sat, emptying our little basket of fruit and country cakes, till Emily was seized with a desire of viewing, from the other side of the Loddon, the scenery which had so much enchanted her. "I must," said she, "take a sketch of the ivied boat-house, and of this sweet room, and this pleasant window—Grandmamma would never be able to walk from the road to see the place itself, but she must see its likeness." So forth we sallied, not forgetting the dear musk roses.

We had no way of reaching the desired spot but by retracing our steps a mile, during the heat of the

hottest hour of the day, and then following the course of the river to an equal distance on the other side; nor had we any materials for sketching, except the rumpled paper which had contained our repast, and a pencil without a point which I happened to have about me. But these small difficulties are pleasures to gay and happy youth. Regardless of such obstacles, the sweet Emily bounded on like a fawn, and I followed, delighting in her delight. The sun went in, and the walk was delicious; a reviving coolness seemed to breathe over the water, wafting the balmy scent of the firs and limes; we found a point of view presenting the boat-house, the water, the poplars, and the mill, in a most felicitous combination; the little straw fruit basket made a capital table; and refreshed and sharpened and pointed by our trusty lackey's excellent knife (your country boy is never without a good knife, it is his prime treasure), the pencil did double duty—first in the skilful hands of Emily, whose faithful and spirited sketch does equal honour to the scene and to the artist, and then in the humbler office of attempting a faint transcript of my own impressions in the following sonnet:—

It was an hour of calmest noon, at day
  Of ripest summer: o'er the deep blue sky
  White speckled clouds came sailing peacefully,
Half-shrouding in a chequer'd veil the ray
Of the sun, too ardent else—what time we lay
  By the smooth Loddon, opposite the high,
  Steep bank, which as a coronet gloriously
Wore its rich crest of firs and lime trees, gay
  With their pale tassels; while from out a bower
Of ivy (where those column'd poplars rear
  Their heads) the ruin'd boat-house, like a tower,
Flung its deep shadow on the waters clear.
  My Emily! forget not that calm hour,
Nor that fair scene, by thee made doubly dear!

THE HARD SUMMER.

AUGUST 15th.—Cold, cloudy, windy, wet. Here we are, in the midst of the dog-days, clustering merrily round the warm hearth like so many crickets, instead of chirruping in the green fields like that other merry insect, the grasshopper; shivering under the influence of the *Jupiter Pluvius* of England, the watery St. Swithin; peering at that scarce personage, the sun, when he happens to make his appearance, as intently as astronomers look after a comet, or the common people stare at a balloon; exclaiming against the cold weather, just as we used to exclaim against the warm. "What a change from last year!" is the first sentence you hear, go where you may. Everybody remarks it, and everybody complains of it; and yet in my mind it has its advantages, or at least its compensations, as everything in nature has, if we would only take the trouble to seek for them.

Last year, in spite of the love which we are now pleased to profess towards that ardent luminary, not one of the sun's numerous admirers had courage to look him in the face: there was no bearing the world till he had said "good-night" to it. Then we might stir: then we began to wake and to live. All day long we languished under his influence in a strange dreaminess,

too hot to work, too hot to read, too hot to write, too hot even to talk; sitting hour after hour in a green arbour, embowered in leafiness, letting thought and fancy float as they would. Those day-dreams were pretty things in their way; there is no denying that. But then, if one half of the world were to dream through a whole summer, like the sleeping Beauty in the Wood, what would become of the other?

The only office requiring the slightest exertion which I performed in that warm weather was watering my flowers. Common sympathy called for that labour. The poor things withered, and faded, and pined away; they almost, so to say, panted for draught. Moreover, if I had not watered them myself, I suspect that no one else would; for water last year was nearly as precious hereabout as wine. Our land-springs were dried up; our wells were exhausted; our deep ponds were dwindling into mud; and geese, and ducks, and pigs, and laundresses, used to look with a jealous and suspicious eye on the few and scanty half-buckets of that impure element, which my trusty lackey was fain to filch for my poor geraniums and campanulas and tuberoses. We were forced to smuggle them in through my faithful adherent's territories, the stable, to avoid lectures within doors; and at last even that resource failed; my garden, my blooming garden, the joy of my eyes, was forced to go waterless like its neighbours, and became shrivelled, scorched, and sunburnt, like them. It really went to my heart to look at it.

On the other side of the house matters were still worse. What a dusty world it was, when about sunset we became cool enough to creep into it! Flowers in the court looking fit for a *hortus siccus;* mummies

of plants, dried as in an oven ; hollyhocks, once pink, turned into Quakers ; cloves smelling of dust. Oh, dusty world! May herself looked of that complexion; so did Lizzy ; so did all the houses, windows, chickens, children, trees, and pigs in the village ; so above all did the shoes. No foot could make three plunges into that abyss of pulverised gravel, which had the impudence to call itself a hard road, without being clothed with a coat a quarter of an inch thick. Woe to white gowns! woe to black! Drab was your only wear.

Then, when we were out of the street, what a toil it was to mount the hill, climbing with weary steps and slow upon the brown turf by the way-side, slippery, hot, and hard as a rock! And then if we happened to meet a carriage coming along the middle of the road—the bottomless middle—what a sandy whirlwind it was! What choking! what suffocation! No state could be more pitiable, except, indeed, that of the travellers who carry this misery about with them. I shall never forget the plight in which we met the coach one evening in last August, full an hour after its time, steeds and driver, carriage and passengers, all in dust. The outsiders, and the horses, and the coachman, seemed reduced to a torpid quietness, the resignation of despair. They had left off trying to better their condition, and taken refuge in a wise and patient hopelessness, bent to endure in silence the extremity of ill. The six insides, on the contrary, were still fighting against their fate, vainly struggling to ameliorate their hapless destiny. They were visibly grumbling at the weather, scolding at the dust, and heating themselves like a furnace, by striving against the heat. How well I

remember the fat gentleman without his coat, who was wiping his forehead, heaving up his wig, and certainly uttering that English ejaculation, which, to our national reproach, is the phrase of our language best known on the continent. And that poor boy, red-hot, all in a flame, whose mamma, having divested her own person of all superfluous apparel, was trying to relieve his sufferings by the removal of his neck-erchief—an operation which he resisted with all his might. How perfectly I remember him, as well as the pale girl who sat opposite, fanning herself with her bonnet into an absolute fever! They vanished after a while into their own dust; but I have them all before my eyes at this moment, a companion picture to Hogarth's Afternoon, a standing lesson to the grumblers at cold summers.

For my part, I really like this wet season. It keeps us within, to be sure, rather more than is quite agreeable; but then we are at least awake and alive there, and the world out of doors is so much the pleasanter when we can get abroad. Everything does well, except those fastidious bipeds, men and women; corn ripens, grass grows, fruit is plentiful; there is no lack of birds to eat it, and there has not been such a wasp-season these dozen years. My garden wants no watering, and is more beautiful than ever, beating my old rival in that primitive art, the pretty wife of the little mason, out and out. Measured with mine, her flowers are naught. Look at those hollyhocks, like pyramids of roses; those garlands of the convolvulus major of all colours, hanging around that tall pole, like the wreathy hop-bine; those magnificent dusky cloves, breathing of the Spice Islands; those flaunting double dahlias; those splendid scarlet geraniums,

and those fierce and warlike flowers, the tiger-lilies. Oh, how beautiful they are! Besides, the weather clears sometimes—it has cleared this evening; and here are we, after a merry walk up the hill, almost as quick as in the winter, bounding lightly along the bright green turf of the pleasant common, enticed by the gay shouts of a dozen clear, young voices, to linger awhile, and see the boys play at cricket.

I plead guilty to a strong partiality towards that unpopular class of beings, country boys; I have a large acquaintance amongst them, and I can almost say, that I know good of many and harm of none. In general, they are an open, spirited, good-humoured race, with a proneness to embrace the pleasures and eschew the evils of their condition a capacity for happiness, quite unmatched in man, or woman, or a girl. They are patient, too, and bear their fate as scape-goats (for all sins whatsoever are laid, as matters of course, to their door), whether at home or abroad, with amazing resignation; and, considering the many lies of which they are the objects, they tell wonderfully few in return. The worst that can be said of them is, that they seldom, when grown to man's estate, keep the promise of their boyhood; but that is a fault to come—a fault that may not come, and ought not to be anticipated. It is astonishing how sensible they are to notice from their betters, or those whom they think such. I do not speak of money, or gifts, or praise, or the more coarse and common briberies—they are more delicate courtiers; a word, a nod, a smile, or the mere calling of them by their names, is enough to insure their hearts and their services. Half-a-dozen of them, poor urchins, have run away now to bring us chairs from their several

homes. "Thank you, Joe Kirby!—you are always first—yes, that is just the place—I shall see everything there. Have you been in yet, Joe?"—"No, ma'am! I go in next."—"Ah, I am glad of that—and now's the time. Really, that was a pretty ball of Jem Eusden's!—I was sure it would go to the wicket. Run, Joe! They are waiting for you." There was small need to bid Joe Kirby make haste; I think he is, next to a race-horse, or a greyhound, or a deer, the fastest creature that runs—the most completely alert and active. Joe is mine especial friend, and leader of the "tender juveniles," as Joel Brent is of the adults. In both instances this post of honour was gained by merit, even more remarkably so in Joe's case than in Joel's; for Joe is a less boy than many of his companions (some of whom are fifteeners and sixteeners, quite as tall and nearly as old as Tom Coper), and a poorer than all, as may be conjectured from the lamentable state of that patched, round frock, and the ragged condition of those unpatched shoes, which would encumber, if anything could, the light feet that wear them. But why should I lament the poverty that never troubles him? Joe is the merriest and happiest creature that ever lived twelve years in this wicked world. Care cannot come near him. He hath a perpetual smile on his round, ruddy face, and a laugh in his hazel eye that drives the witch away. He works at yonder farm on the top of the hill, where he is in such repute for intelligence and good-humour, that he has the honour of performing all the errands of the house, of helping the maid, the mistress, and the master, in addition to his own stated office of carter's boy. There he works hard from five till seven, and then he comes here to work still harder,

under the name of play—batting, bowling, and fielding, as if for life, filling the place of four boys; being, at a pinch, a whole eleven. The late Mr. Knyvett, the king's organist, who used in his own person to sing twenty parts at once of the hallelujah chorus, so that you would have thought he had a nest of nightingales in his throat, was but a type of Joe Kirby. There is a sort of ubiquity about him; he thinks nothing of being in two places at once, and for pitching a ball, William Grey himself is nothing to him. It goes straight to the mark like a bullet. He is king of the cricketers from eight to sixteen, both inclusive, and an excellent ruler he makes. Nevertheless, in the best-ordered states there will be grumblers, and we have an opposition here in the shape of Jem Eusden.

Jem Eusden is a stunted lad of thirteen, or thereabout, lean, small, and short, yet strong and active. His face is of an extraordinary ugliness, colourless, withered, haggard, with a look of extreme age, much increased by hair so light that it might rather pass for white than flaxen. He is constantly arrayed in the blue cap and old-fashioned coat, the costume of an endowed school to which he belongs; where he sits still all day, and rushes into the field at night, fresh, untired, and ripe for action, to scold, and brawl, and storm, and bluster. He hates Joe Kirby, whose immovable good-humour, broad smiles, and knowing nods, must certainly be very provoking to so fierce and turbulent a spirit; and he has himself (being, except by rare accident, no great player) the preposterous ambition of wishing to be manager of the sports. In short, he is a demagogue in embryo, with every quality necessary to a splendid success in that

vocation—a strong voice, a fluent utterance, an incessant iteration, and a frontless impudence. He is a great "scholar" too, to use the country phrase; his "piece," as our village schoolmaster terms a fine sheet of flourishing writing, something between a valentine and a sampler, enclosed within a border of little coloured prints—his last, I remember, was encircled by an engraved history of Moses, beginning at the finding in the bulrushes, with Pharaoh's daughter dressed in a rose-coloured gown and blue feathers—his piece is not only the admiration of the school, but of the parish, and is sent triumphantly round from house to house at Christmas, to extort halfpence and sixpences from all encouragers of learning—*Montem* in miniature. The Mosaic history was so successful, that the produce enabled Jem to purchase a bat and ball, which, besides adding to his natural arrogance (for the little pedant actually began to mutter against being eclipsed by a dunce, and went so far as to challenge Joe Kirby to a trial in Practice, or the Rule of Three), gave him, when compared with the general poverty, a most unnatural preponderance in the cricket state. He had the ways and means in his hands—(for, alas! the hard winter had made sad havoc among the bats, and the best ball was a bad one)—he had the ways and means, could withhold the supplies, and his party was beginning to wax strong, when Joe received a present of two bats and a ball for the youngsters in general and himself in particular—and Jem's adherents left him on the spot—they ratted, to a man, that very evening. Notwithstanding this desertion, their forsaken leader has in nothing relaxed from his pretensions or his ill-humour. He still quarrels and brawls as if he had a faction to back him, and thinks nothing

of contending with both sides, the ins and the outs, secure of out-talking the whole field. He has been squabbling these ten minutes, and is just marching off now with his own bat (he has never deigned to use one of Joe's) in his hand. What an ill-conditioned hobgoblin it is! And yet there is something bold and sturdy about him, too. I should miss Jem Eusden.

Ah, there is another deserter from the party! my friend the little hussar—I do not know his name, and call him after his cap and jacket. He is a very remarkable person, about the age of eight years, the youngest piece of gravity and dignity I ever encountered; short, and square, and upright, and slow, with a fine, bronzed, flat visage, resembling those convertible signs, the Broad-Face and the Saracen's-Head (which, happening to be next-door neighbours in the town of B., I never knew apart), resembling, indeed, any face that is open-eyed and immovable, the very sign of a boy! he stalks about with his hands in his breeches pocket, like a piece of machinery; sits leisurely down when he ought to field, and never gets farther in batting than to stop the ball. His is the only voice never heard in the *mêlée;* I doubt, indeed, if he have one, which may be partly the reason of a circumstance that I record to his honour, his fidelity to Jem Eusden, to whom he has adhered through every change of fortune, with a tenacity proceeding, perhaps, from an instinctive consciousness that the loquacious leader talks enough for two. He is the only thing resembling a follower that our demagogue possesses, and is cherished by him accordingly. Jem quarrels for him, scolds for him, pushes for him; and but for Joe Kirby's invincible good-humour, and a just discrimi-

nation of the innocent from the guilty, the activity of Jem's friendship would get the poor hussar ten drubbings a-day.

But it is growing late. The sun has set a long time. Only see what a gorgeous colouring has spread itself over those parting masses of clouds in the west —what a train of rosy light! We shall have a fine sunshiny day to-morrow—a blessing not to be undervalued, in spite of my vituperation of heat. Shall we go home now? And shall we take the longest but prettiest road, that by the green lanes? This way, to the left, round the corner of the common, past Mr. Welles's cottage, and our path lies straight before us. How snug and comfortable that cottage looks! Its little yard all alive with the cow and the mare, and the colt almost as large as the mare, and the young foal, and the great yard-dog, all so fat! Fenced in with hay-rick, and wheat-rick, and bean-stalk, and backed by the long garden, the spacious drying-ground, the fine orchard, and that large field quartered into four different crops. How comfortable this cottage looks, and how well the owners earn their comforts! They are the most prosperous pair in the parish—she a laundress, with twenty times more work than she can do, unrivalled in flounces and shirt-frills, and such delicacies of the craft; he, partly a farmer, partly a farmer's man, tilling his own ground, and then tilling other people's—affording a proof, even in this declining age, when the circumstances of so many worthy members of the community seem to have "an alacrity in sinking," that it is possible to amend them by sheer industry. He, who was born in the workhouse, and bred up as a parish boy, has now, by mere manual labour, risen to the rank of a land-

owner, pays rates and taxes, grumbles at the times, and is called Master Welles—the title next to Mister —that by which Shakespeare was called—what would man have more? His wife, besides being the best laundress in the county, is a comely woman still. There she stands at the spring, dipping up water for to-morrow—the clear, deep, silent spring, which sleeps so peacefully under its high, flowery bank, red with the tall spiral stalks of the foxglove and their rich, pendant bells, blue with the beautiful forget-me-not, that gem-like blossom, which looks like a living jewel of turquoise and topaz. It is almost too late to see its beauty; and here is the pleasant shady lane, where the high elms will shut out the little twilight that remains. Ah, but we shall have the fairies' lamps to guide us, the stars of the earth, the glowworms! Here they are, three almost together. Do you not see them? One seems tremulous, vibrating, as if on the extremity of a leaf of grass; the others are deeper in the hedge, in some green cell, on which their light falls with an emerald lustre. I hope my friends the cricketers will not come this way home. I would not have the pretty creatures removed for more than I care to say, and in this matter I would hardly trust Joe Kirby—boys so love to stick them in their hats. But this lane is quite deserted. It is only a road from field to field. No one comes here at this hour. They are quite safe; and I shall walk here to-morrow and visit them again. And now, good night! beautiful insects lamp of the fairies, good night!

THE SHAW.

SEPTEMBER 9th.—A bright, sunshiny afternoon. What a comfort it is to get out again—to see once more that rarity of rarities, a fine day! We English people are accused of talking over much of the weather; but the weather, this summer, has forced people to talk of it. Summer! did I say? Oh! season most unworthy of that sweet, sunny name! Season of coldness and cloudiness, of gloom and rain! A worse November!—for in November the days are short; and shut up in a warm room, lighted by that household sun, a lamp, one feels through the long evenings comfortably independent of the out-of-door tempests. But though we may have, and did have, fires all through the dog-days, there is no shutting out daylight; and sixteen hours of rain, pattering against the windows and dripping from the eaves—sixteen hours of rain, not merely audible, but visible for seven days in the week—would be enough to exhaust the patience of Job or Grizzel; especially if Job were a farmer, and Grizzel a country gentlewoman. Never was known such a season! Hay swimming, cattle drowning, fruit rotting, corn spoiling! and that naughty river, the Loddon, who never can take Puff's advice, and "keep between its

banks," running about the country, fields, roads, gardens, and houses, like mad! The weather would be talked of. Indeed, it was not easy to talk of anything else. A friend of mine having occasion to write me a letter, thought it worth abusing in rhyme, and bepommelled it through three pages of Bath-guide verse; of which I subjoin a specimen:—

"Aquarius surely *reigns* over the world,
And of late he his water-pot strangely has twirl'd;
Or he's taken a cullender up by mistake,
And unceasingly dips it in some mighty lake;
Though it is not in Lethe—for who can forget
The annoyance of getting most thoroughly wet?
It must be in the river called Styx, I declare,
For the moment it drizzles it makes the men swear.
'It did rain to-morrow,' is growing good grammar;
Vauxhall and camp-stools have been brought to the hammer;
A pony-gondola is all I can keep,
And I use my umbrella and pattens in sleep:
Row out of my window, whene'er 'tis my whim
To visit a friend, and just ask, 'Can you swim?'"

So far my friend.* In short, whether in prose or in verse, everybody railed at the weather. But this is over now. The sun has come to dry the world;

* This friend of mine is a person of great quickness and talent, who, if she were not a beauty and a woman of fortune—that is to say, if she were prompted by either of those two powerful *stimuli*, want of money or want of admiration, to take due pains—would inevitably become a clever writer. As it is, her notes and *jeux d'esprit* struck off *à trait de plume*, have great point and neatness. Take the following billet, which formed the label to a closed basket, containing the ponderous present alluded to, last Michaelmas day:—

"*To Miss M.*

'When this you see,
Remember me,'
Was long a phrase in use;
And so I send
To you, dear friend,
My proxy, 'What?'—A goose!"

mud is turned into dust ; rivers have retreated to their proper limits ; farmers have left off grumbling ; and we are about to take a walk, as usual, as far as the Shaw, a pretty wood about a mile off. But one of our companions being a stranger to the gentle reader, we must do him the honour of an introduction.

Dogs, when they are sure of having their own way, have sometimes ways as odd as those of the unfurred, unfeathered animals, who walk on two legs, and talk, and are called rational. My beautiful white grey-hound, Mayflower,* for instance, is as whimsical as the finest lady in the land. Amongst her other fancies, she has taken a violent affection for a most hideous stray dog, who made his appearance here about six months ago, and contrived to pick up a living in the village, one can hardly tell how. Now appealing to the charity of old Rachel Strong, the laundress—a dog-lover by profession ; now winning a meal from the light-footed and open-hearted lasses at the Rose ; now standing on his hind-legs, to extort by sheer beggary a scanty morsel from some pair of "drouthy cronies," or solitary drover, discussing his dinner or supper on the alehouse bench ; now catching a mouthful, flung to him in pure contempt by some scornful gentleman of the shoulder-knot, mounted on his throne, the coach-box, whose notice he had attracted by dint of ugliness ; now sharing the commons of Master Keep the shoemaker's pigs ; now succeeding to the reversion of the well-gnawed bone of Master Brown the shopkeeper's fierce house-dog ; now filching the skim-milk of Dame Wheeler's cat—spit at by the cat ; worried by the mastiff ; chased by the pigs ; screamed at by the dame ; stormed at by the

* Dead, alas, since this was written.

shoemaker; flogged by the shopkeeper; teased by all the children, and scouted by all the animals of the parish—but yet living through his griefs, and bearing them patiently, "for sufferance is the badge of all his tribe"—and even seeming to find, in an occasional full meal, or a gleam of sunshine, or a wisp of dry straw on which to repose his sorry carcass, some comfort in his disconsolate condition.

In this plight was he found by May, the most high-blooded and aristocratic of greyhounds; and from this plight did May rescue him; invited him into her territory, the stable; resisted all attempts to turn him out; reinstated him there, in spite of maid and boy, and mistress and master; wore out everybody's opposition by the activity of her protection, and the pertinacity of her self-will; made him sharer of her bed and of her mess; and, finally, established him as one of the family as firmly as herself.

Dash—for he has even won himself a name amongst us; before he was anonymous—Dash is a sort of a kind of a spaniel; at least there is in his mongrel composition some sign of that beautiful race. Besides his ugliness, which is of the worst sort—that is to say, the shabbiest—he has a limp on one leg that gives a peculiar one-sided awkwardness to his gait; but independently of his great merit in being May's pet, he has other merits which serve to account for that phenomenon—being, beyond all comparison, the most faithful, attached, and affectionate animal that I have ever known; and that is saying much. He seems to think it necessary to atone for his ugliness by extra good conduct, and does so dance on his lame leg, and so wag his scrubby tail, that it does any one who has a taste for happiness good to look at him—so that

he may now be said to stand on his own footing. We are all rather ashamed of him when strangers come in the way, and think it necessary to explain that he is May's pet; but amongst ourselves, and those who are used to his appearance, he has reached the point of favouritism in his own person. I have, in common with wiser women, the feminine weakness of loving whatever loves me—and, therefore, I like Dash. His master has found out that he is a capital finder, and in spite of his lameness will hunt a field or beat a cover with any spaniel in England—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash. The boy has fought a battle, in defence of his beauty, with another boy bigger than himself, and beat his opponent most handsomely—and, therefore, *he* likes Dash; and the maids like him, or pretend to like him, because we do—as is the fashion of that pliant and imitative class. And now Dash and May follow us everywhere, and are going with us to the Shaw, as I said before—or rather to the cottage by the Shaw, to bespeak milk and butter of our little dairy-woman, Hannah Bint—a housewifely occupation, to which we owe some of our pleasantest rambles.

And now we pass the sunny, dusty village street—who would have thought, a month ago, that we should complain of sun and dust again!—and turn the corner where the two great oaks hang so beautifully over the clear, deep pond, mixing their cool green shadows with the bright blue sky, and the white clouds that flit over it; and loiter at the wheeler's shop, always picturesque, with its tools, and its work, and its materials, all so various in form, and so harmonious in colour; and its noisy, merry workmen, hammering and singing, and making a various harmony also. The shop is rather empty to-day, for its usual inmates are busy on the

green beyond the pond—one set building a cart, another painting a waggon. And then we leave the village quite behind, and proceed slowly up the cool, quiet lane, between tall hedge-rows of the darkest verdure, overshadowing banks green and fresh as an emerald.

Not so quick as I expected, though—for they are shooting here to-day, as Dash and I have both discovered: he with great delight, for a gun to him is as a trumpet to a war-horse; I with no less annoyance, for I don't think a partridge itself, barring the accident of being killed, can be more startled than I at that abominable explosion. Dash has certainly better blood in his veins than anyone would guess to look at him. He even shows some inclination to elope into the fields, in pursuit of those noisy iniquities. But he is an orderly person after all, and a word has checked him.

Ah! here is a shriller din mingling with the small artillery—a shriller and more continuous. We are not yet arrived within sight of Master Weston's cottage, snugly hidden behind a clump of elms; but we are in full hearing of Dame Weston's tongue, raised, as usual, to scolding pitch. The Westons are new arrivals in our neighbourhood, and the first thing heard of them was a complaint from the wife to our magistrate of her husband's beating her: it was a regular charge of assault—an information in full form. A most piteous case did Dame Weston make of it, softening her voice for the nonce into a shrill, tremulous whine, and exciting the mingled pity and anger—pity towards herself, anger towards her husband—of the whole female world, pitiful and indignant as the female world is wont to be on

such occasions. Every woman in the parish railed at Master Weston; and poor Master Weston was summoned to attend the bench on the ensuing Saturday, and answer the charge; and such was the clamour abroad and at home, that the unlucky culprit, terrified at the sound of a warrant and a constable, ran away, and was not heard of for a fortnight.

At the end of that time he was discovered, and brought to the bench; and Dame Weston again told her story, and, as before, on the full cry. She had no witnesses, and the bruises of which she had made complaint had disappeared, and there were no women present to make common cause with the sex. Still, however, the general feeling was against Master Weston; and it would have gone hard with him when he was called in, if a most unexpected witness had not risen up in his favour. His wife had brought in her arms a little girl about eighteen months old, partly, perhaps, to move compassion in her favour; for a woman with a child in her arms is always an object that excites kind feelings. The little girl had looked shy and frightened, and had been as quiet as a lamb during her mother's examination; but she no sooner saw her father, from whom she had been a fortnight separated, than she clapped her hands, and laughed, and cried, "Daddy! daddy!" and sprang into his arms, and hung round his neck, and covered him with kisses—again shouting, "Daddy, come home! daddy! daddy!"—and finally nestled her little head in his bosom, with a fulness of contentment, an assurance of tenderness and protection, such as no wife-beating tyrant ever did inspire, or ever could inspire, since the days of King Solomon. Our magistrates acted in the

very spirit of the Jewish monarch: they accepted the evidence of nature, and dismissed the complaint. And subsequent events have fully justified their decision; Mistress Weston proving not only renowned for the feminine accomplishment of scolding (tongue-banging, it is called in our parts, a compound word which deserves to be Greek), but is actually herself addicted to administering the conjugal discipline, the infliction of which she was pleased to impute to her luckless husband.

Now we cross the stile, and walk up the fields to the Shaw. How beautifully green this pasture looks! and how finely the evening sun glances between the boles of that clump of trees, beech, and ash, and aspen! and how sweet the hedge-rows are with woodbine and wild scabious, or, as the country people call it, the gipsy-rose! Here is little Dolly Weston, the unconscious witness, with cheeks as red as a real rose, tottering up the path to meet her father. And here is the carrotty-polled urchin, George Coper, returning from work, and singing, "Home! sweet home!" at the top of his voice; and then, when the notes prove too high for him, continuing the air in a whistle, until he has turned the impassible corner; then taking up again the song and the words, "Home! sweet home!" and looking as if he felt their full import, ploughboy though he be. And so he does; for he is one of a large, an honest, a kind, and an industrious family, where all goes well, and where the poor ploughboy is sure of finding cheerful faces and coarse comforts—all that he has learned to desire. Oh, to be as cheaply and as thoroughly contented as George Coper! All his luxuries, a cricket-match!—all his wants satisfied in "Home! sweet home!"

Nothing but noises to-day! They are clearing Farmer Brooke's great bean-field, and crying the "Harvest Home!" in a chorus, before which all other sounds—the song, the scolding, the gunnery—fade away, and become faint echoes. A pleasant noise is that! though, for one's ears' sake, one makes some haste to get away from it. And here, in happy time, is that pretty wood, the Shaw, with its broad pathway, its tangled dingles, its nuts and its honeysuckles—and, carrying away a fagot of those sweetest flowers, we reach Hannah Bint's; of whom we shall say more another time.

NOTE.—Poor Dash is also dead. We did not keep him long; indeed, I believe that he died of the transition from starvation to good feed, as dangerous to a dog's stomach and to most stomachs, as the less agreeable change from good feed to starvation. He has been succeeded in place and favour by another Dash, not less amiable in demeanour and far more creditable in appearance, bearing no small resemblance to the pet spaniel of my friend Master Dinely, he who stole the bone from the magpies, and who figures as the first Dash of this volume. Let not the unwary reader opine that, in assigning the same name to three several individuals, I am acting as an humble imitator of the inimitable writer who has given immortality to the Peppers and the Mustards, on the one hand; or showing a poverty of invention, or a want of acquaintance with the bead-roll of canine appellations, on the other I merely, with my usual scrupulous fidelity, take the names as I find them. The fact is, that half the handsome spaniels in England are called Dash, just as half the tall footmen are called Thomas. The name belongs to the species. Sitting in an open carriage one day last summer at the door of a farm-house where my father had some business, I saw a noble and beautiful animal of this kind lying in great state and laziness on the steps, and felt an immediate desire to make acquaintance with him. My father, who had had the same fancy, had patted him and called him "poor fellow" in passing, without eliciting the smallest notice in return. "Dash!" cried I, at a venture, "good Dash! noble Dash!" and up he started in a moment, making but one spring from the door into the gig. Of course I was right in my guess. The gentleman's name was Dash.

NUTTING.

SEPTEMBER 26th.—One of those delicious autumnal days, when the air, the sky, and the earth seemed lulled into a universal calm, softer and milder even than May. We sallied forth for a walk, in a mood congenial to the weather and the season, avoiding, by mutual consent, the bright and sunny common, and the gay highroad, and stealing through shady, unfrequented lanes, where we were not likely to meet anyone—not even the pretty family procession which in other years we used to contemplate with so much interest—the father, mother, and children, returning from the wheat-field, the little ones laden with bristling close-tied bunches of wheat-ears, their own gleanings, or a bottle and a basket which had contained their frugal dinner, whilst the mother would carry her babe, hushing and lulling it, and the father and an elder child trudged after with the cradle, all seeming weary and all happy. We shall not see such a procession as this to-day; for the harvest is nearly over, the fields are deserted, the silence may almost be felt. Except the wintry notes of the redbreast, nature herself is mute. But how beautiful, how gentle, how harmonious, how rich! the rain has preserved to the herbage all the freshness and

verdure of spring, and the world of leaves has lost nothing of its midsummer brightness, and the harebell is on the banks, and the woodbine in the hedges, and the low furze, which the lambs cropped in the spring, has burst again into its golden blossoms.

All is beautiful that the eye can see; perhaps the more beautiful for being shut in with a forest-like closeness. We have no prospect in this labyrinth of lanes, cross-roads, mere cart-ways, leading to the innumerable little farms into which this part of the parish is divided. Uphill or down, these quiet woody lanes scarcely give us a peep at the world, except when, leaning over a gate, we look into one of the small enclosures, hemmed in with hedgerows, so closely set with growing timber, that the meady opening looks almost like a glade in a wood; or when some cottage, planted at a corner of one of the little greens formed by the meeting of these cross-ways, almost startles us by the unexpected sight of the dwellings of men in such a solitude. But that we have more of hill and dale, and that our cross-roads are excellent in their kind, this side of our parish would resemble the description given of La Vendée, in Madame Laroche-Jacquelin's most interesting book.* I am sure if wood can entitle a country to be called Le Bocage, none can have a better right to the name. Even this pretty snug farm-house on the hillside, with its front covered with the rich vine, which goes wreathing up to the very

* An almost equally interesting account of that very peculiar and interesting scenery may be found in *The Maid of La Vendée*, an English novel, remarkable for its simplicity and truth of painting, written by Mrs. Le Noir, the daughter of Christopher Smart, an inheritrix of much of his talent. Her works deserve to be better known.

top of the clustered chimney, and its sloping orchard full of fruit—even this pretty, quiet nest can hardly peep out of its leaves. Ah! they are gathering in the orchard harvest. Look at that young rogue in the old mossy apple-tree—that great tree, bending with the weight of its golden-rennets—see how he pelts his little sister beneath with apples as red and as round as her own cheeks, while she, with her out-stretched frock, is trying to catch them, and laughing and offering to pelt again as often as one bobs against her; and look at that still younger imp, who, as grave as a judge, is creeping on hands and knees under the tree, picking up the apples as they fall so deedily,* and depositing them so honestly in the great basket on the grass, already fixed so firmly and opened so widely, and filled almost to overflowing by the brown rough fruitage of the golden-rennet's next neighbour, the russeting; and see that smallest urchin of all, seated apart in infantine state on the turfy bank, with that toothsome piece of deformity, a crumpling, in each hand, now biting from one sweet, hard, juicy morsel, and now from another. Is not that a pretty English picture? And then, farther up the orchard, that bold, hardy lad, the eldest born, who has scaled (heaven knows how) the tall, straight upper branch of that great pear-tree, and is sitting there as securely and as fearlessly, in as much real safety and apparent danger, as a sailor on the top-mast. Now he shakes the tree with a mighty swing that brings down a

* "Deedily."—I am not quite sure that this word is good English; but it is genuine Hampshire, and is used by the most correct of female writers, Miss Austen. It means (and it is no small merit that it has no exact synonyme) anything done with a profound and plodding attention, an action which engrosses all the powers of mind and body.

pelting shower of stony bergamots, which the father gathers rapidly up, whilst the mother can hardly assist for her motherly fear—a fear which only spurs the spirited boy to bolder ventures. Is not that a pretty picture? And they are such a handsome family too, the Brookers. I do not know that there is any gipsy blood, but there is the true gipsy complexion, richly brown, with cheeks and lips so red, black hair curling close to their heads in short, crisp rings, white shining teeth—and such eyes!—That sort of beauty entirely eclipses your mere roses and lilies. Even Lizzy, the prettiest of fair children, would look poor and watery by the side of Willy Brooker, the sober little personage who is picking up the apples with his small chubby hands, and filling the basket so orderly, next to his father the most useful man in the field. "Willy!" He hears without seeing; for we are quite hidden by the high bank, and a spreading hawthorn bush that overtops it, though between the lower branches and the grass we have found a convenient peephole. "Willy!" The voice sounds to him like some fairy dream, and the black eyes are raised from the ground with sudden wonder, the long silky eyelashes thrown back till they rest on the delicate brow, and a deeper blush is burning on those dark cheeks, and a smile is dimpling about those scarlet lips. But the voice is silent now, and the little quiet boy, after a moment's pause, is gone coolly to work again. He is, indeed, a most lovely child. I think some day or another he must marry Lizzy; I shall propose the match to their respective mammas. At present the parties are rather too young for a wedding—the intended bridegroom being, as I should judge, six, or thereabout,

and the fair bride barely five—but at least we might have a betrothment after the royal fashion—there could be no harm in that. Miss Lizzy, I have no doubt, would be as demure and coquettish as if ten winters more had gone over her head, and poor Willy would open his innocent black eyes, and wonder what was going forward. They would be the very Oberon and Titania of the village—the fairy king and queen.

Ah! here is the hedge along which the periwinkle wreathes and twines so profusely, with its evergreen leaves shining like the myrtle, and its starry blue flowers. It is seldom found wild in this part of England; but, when we do meet with it, it is so abundant and so welcome,—the very robin-redbreast of flowers, a winter friend. Unless in those unfrequent frosts which destroy all vegetation, it blossoms from September to June, surviving the last lingering crane's-bill, forerunning the earliest primrose, hardier even than the mountain daisy—peeping out from beneath the snow, looking at itself in the ice, smiling through the tempests of life, and yet welcoming and enjoying the sunbeams. Oh, to be like that flower!

The little spring that has been bubbling under the hedge all along the hillside, begins, now that we have mounted the eminence and are imperceptibly descending, to deviate into a capricious variety of clear, deep pools and channels, so narrow and so choked with weeds, that a child might overstep them. The hedge has also changed its character. It is no longer the close, compact vegetable wall of hawthorn, and maple, and brier-roses, intertwined with bramble and woodbine, and crowned with large elms or thickly set saplings. No! the pretty meadow which rises high above us, backed and almost surrounded by a tall

coppice, needs no defence on our side but its own steep bank, garnished with tufts of broom, with pollard oaks wreathed with ivy, and here and there with long patches of hazel overhanging the water. "Ah, there are still nuts on that bough!" and in an instant my dear companion, active and eager and delighted as a boy, has hooked down with his walking-stick one of the lissome hazel stalks, and cleared it of its tawny clusters, and in another moment he has mounted the bank, and is in the midst of the nuttery, now transferring the spoil from the lower branches into that vast variety of pockets which gentlemen carry about them, now bending the tall tops into the lane, holding them down by main force, so that I might reach them and enjoy the pleasure of collecting some of the plunder myself. A very great pleasure he knew it would be. I doffed my shawl, tucked up my flounces, turned my straw bonnet into a basket, and began gathering and scrambling—for, manage it how you may, nutting is scrambling work—those boughs, however tightly you may grasp them by the young, fragrant twigs and the bright, green leaves, will recoil and burst away; but there is a pleasure even in that: so on we go, scrambling and gathering with all our might and all our glee. Oh what an enjoyment! All my life long I have had a passion for that sort of seeking which implies finding (the secret, I believe, of the love of field-sports, which is in man's mind a natural impulse)—therefore I love violeting—therefore, when we had a fine garden, I used to love to gather strawberries, and cut asparagus, and above all, to collect the filberts from the shrubberies: but this hedge-row nutting beats that sport all to nothing.

That is a make-believe thing compared with this; there was no surprise, no suspense, no unexpectedness—it was as inferior to this wild nutting as the turning out of a bag-fox is to unearthing the fellow, in the eyes of a staunch fox-hunter.

Oh what enjoyment this nut-gathering is! They are in such abundance, that it seems as if there were not a boy in the parish, nor a young man, nor a young woman—for a basket of nuts is the universal tribute of country gallantry; our pretty damsel Harriet has had at least half-a-dozen this season; but no one has found out these. And they are so full, too, we lose half of them from over-ripeness; they drop from the socket at the slightest motion. If we lose, there is one who finds. May is as fond of nuts as a squirrel, and cracks the shell and extracts the kernel with equal dexterity. Her white glossy head is upturned now to watch them as they fall. See how her neck is thrown back like that of a swan, and how her quick eye follows the rustling noise, and her light feet dance and pat the ground, and leap up with eagerness, seeming almost sustained in the air, just as I have seen her, when Brush is beating a hedgerow, and she knows from his questing that there is a hare afoot. See, she has caught that nut just before it touched the water; but the water would have been no defence—she fishes them from the bottom, she delves after them amongst the matted grass—even my bonnet—how beggingly she looks at that! "Oh what a pleasure nutting is!—Is it not, May?" May tosses her graceful head as if she understood the question—"And we must go home now—must we not? But we will come nutting again some time or other—shall we not, my May?"

THE VISIT.

OCTOBER 27th.—A lovely autumnal day; the air soft, balmy, genial; the sky of that softened and delicate blue upon which the eye loves to rest—the blue which gives such relief to the rich beauty of the earth, all around glowing in the ripe and mellow tints of the most gorgeous of the seasons. Really such an autumn may well compensate our English climate for the fine spring of the south, that spring of which the poets talk, but which we so seldom enjoy. Such an autumn glows upon us like a splendid evening; it is the very sunset of the year; and I have been tempted forth into a wider range of enjoyment than usual. This *walk* (if I may use the Irish figure of speech called a bull) will be a *ride*. A very dear friend has beguiled me into accompanying her in her pretty equipage to her beautiful home, four miles off; and having sent forward in the style of a running footman the servant who had driven her, she assumes the reins, and off we set.

My fair companion is a person whom nature and fortune would have spoiled if they could. She is one of those striking women whom a stranger cannot pass without turning to look at again; tall and finely pro-

portioned, with a bold Roman contour of figure and feature, a delicate English complexion, and an air of distinction altogether her own. Her beauty is duchess-like. She seems born to wear feathers and diamonds, and to form the grace and ornament of a court; and the noble frankness and simplicity of her countenance and manner confirm the impression. Destiny has, however, dealt more kindly by her. She is the wife of a rich country gentleman of high descent and higher attainments, to whom she is most devotedly attached—the mother of a little girl as lovely as herself, and the delight of all who have the happiness of her acquaintance, to whom she is endeared not merely by her remarkable sweetness of temper and kindness of heart, but by the singular ingenuousness and openness of character, which communicate an indescribable charm to her conversation. She is as transparent as water. You may see every colour, every shade of a mind as lofty and beautiful as her person. Talking with her is like being in the Palace of Truth described by Madam de Genlis; and yet so kindly are her feelings, so great her indulgence to the little failings and foibles of our common nature, so intense her sympathy with the wants, the wishes, the sorrows, and the happiness of her fellow-creatures, that, with all her frank-speaking, I never knew her make an enemy or lose a friend.

But we must get on. What would she say if she knew I was putting her into print? We must get on up the hill. Ah! that is precisely what we are not likely to do! This horse, this beautiful and high-bred horse, well fed, and fat and glossy, who stood prancing at our gate like an Arabian, has suddenly turned sulky. He does not, indeed, stand quite still,

but his way of moving is little better—the slowest and most sullen of all walks. Even they who ply the hearse at funerals, sad-looking beasts who totter under black feathers, go faster. It is of no use to admonish him by whip, or rein, or word. The rogue has found out that it is a weak and tender hand that guides him now. Oh, for one pull, one stroke of his old driver, the groom! how he would fly! But there is the groom half-a-mile before us, out of earshot, clearing the ground at a capital rate, beating us hollow. He has just turned the top of the hill; and in a moment—ay, now he is out of sight, and will undoubtedly so continue till he meets us at the lawn gate! Well! there is no great harm. It is only prolonging the pleasure of enjoying together this charming scenery in this fine weather. If once we make up our minds not to care how slowly our steed goes, not to fret ourselves by vain exertions, it is no matter what his pace may be. There is little doubt of his getting home by sunset, and that will content us. He is, after all, a fine, noble animal; and perhaps when he finds that we are determined to give him his way, he may relent and give us ours. All his sex are sticklers for dominion, though, when it is undisputed, some of them are generous enough to abandon it. Two or three of the most discreet wives of my acquaintance contrive to manage their husbands sufficiently with no better secret than this seeming submission; and in our case the example has the more weight, since we have no possible way of helping ourselves.

Thus philosophising, we reached the top of the hill, and viewed with "reverted eyes" the expansive and beautiful prospect that lay bathed in golden

sunshine behind us. Cowper says, with that boldness of expressing in poetry the commonest and simplest feelings, which is perhaps the one great secret of his originality—

> "Scenes must be beautiful, which, daily seen,
> Please daily, and whose novelty survives
> Long knowledge and the scrutiny of years."

Every day I walk up this hill—every day I pause at the top to admire the broad winding road with the green waste on each side, uniting it with the thickly timbered hedge-rows; the two pretty cottages at unequal distances, placed so as to mark the bends; the village beyond, with its mass of roofs and clustered chimneys peeping through the trees; and the rich distance, where cottages, mansions, churches, towns, seem embowered in some wide forest, and shut in by blue shadowy hills. Every day I admire this most beautiful landscape; yet never did it seem to me so fine or so glowing as now. All the tints of the glorious autumn—orange, tawny, yellow, red—are poured in profusion among the bright greens of the meadows and turnip-fields, till the eyes are satiated with colour; and then before us we have the common with its picturesque roughness of surface tufted with cottages, dappled with water, edging off on one side into fields and farms and orchards, and terminated on the other by the princely oak avenue. What a richness and variety the wild broken ground gives to the luxuriant cultivation of the rest of the landscape! Cowper has described it for me. How perpetually, as we walk in the country, his vivid pictures recur to the memory! Here is his common and mine!—

> "The common overgrown with fern, and rough
> With prickly gorse, that, shapeless and deform'd,
> And dangerous to the touch, has yet its bloom,
> And decks itself with ornaments of gold—
> ——————————— there the turf
> Smells fresh, and, rich in odoriferous herbs
> And fungous fruits of earth, regales the sense
> With luxury of unexpected sweets."

The description is exact. There, too, to the left, is my cricket-ground (Cowper's common wanted that finishing grace); and there stands one solitary urchin as if in contemplation of its past and future glories; for, alas! cricket is over for the season. Ah! it is Ben Kirby, next brother to Joe, king of the youngsters, and probably his successor—for this Michaelmas has cost us Joe! He is promoted from the farm to the mansion-house, two miles off; there he cleans shoes, rubs knives, and runs on errands, and is, as his mother expresses it, "a sort of 'prentice to the footman." I should not wonder if Joe, some day or other, should overtop the footman, and rise to be butler; and his splendid prospects must be our consolation for the loss of this great favourite. In the meantime we have Ben.

Ben Kirby is a year younger than Joe, and the schoolfellow and rival of Jem Eusden. To be sure, his abilities lie in rather a different line: Jem is a scholar, Ben is a wag; Jem is great in figures and writing, Ben in faces and mischief. His master says of him, that if there were two such in the school he must resign his office; and, as far as my observation goes, the worthy pedagogue is right. Ben is, it must be confessed, a great corrupter of gravity. He hath an exceeding aversion to authority and decorum, and a wonderful boldness and dexterity in overthrowing

the one and puzzling the other. His contortions of visage are astounding. His "power over his own muscles and those of other people" is almost equal to that of Liston; and, indeed, the original face, flat and square and Chinese in its shape, of a fine tan complexion, with a snub nose, and a slit for a mouth, is nearly as comical as that matchless performer's. When aided by Ben's singular mobility of feature, his knowing winks and grins and shrugs and nods, together with a certain dry shrewdness, a habit of saying sharp things, and a marvellous gift of impudence, it forms as fine a specimen as possible of a humorous country boy, an oddity in embryo. Everybody likes Ben except his butts (which may perhaps comprise half his acquaintance); and of them no one so thoroughly hates and dreads him as our parish schoolmaster, a most worthy King Log, whom Ben dumbfounds twenty times a-day. He is a great ornament of the cricket-ground, has a real genius for the game, and displays it after a very original manner, under the disguise of awkwardness—as the clown shows off his agility in a pantomime. Nothing comes amiss to him. By-the-by, he would have been the very lad for us in our present dilemma; not a horse in England could master Ben Kirby. But we are too far from him now—and perhaps it is as well that we are so. I believe the rogue has a kindness for me, in remembrance of certain apples and nuts, which my usual companion, who delights in his wit, is accustomed to dole out to him. But it is a Robin Goodfellow nevertheless, a perfect Puck, that loves nothing on earth so well as mischief. Perhaps the horse may be the safer conductor of the two.

The avenue is quite alive to-day. Old women are

picking up twigs and acorns, and pigs of all sizes doing their utmost to spare them the latter part of the trouble; boys and girls groping for beech-nuts under yonder clump; and a group of younger elves collecting as many dead leaves as they can find, to feed the bonfire which is smoking away so briskly amongst the trees—a sort of rehearsal of the grand bonfire nine days hence; of the loyal conflagration of the arch-traitor Guy Fawkes, which is annually solemnised in the avenue, accompanied with as much squibbery and crackery as our boys can beg or borrow—not to say steal. Ben Kirby is a great man on the fifth of November. All the savings of a month, the hoarded halfpence, the new farthings, the very luck-penny, go off *in fumo* on that night. For my part, I like this daylight mockery better. There is no gunpowder—odious gunpowder! no noise but the merry shouts of the small fry, so shrill and happy, and the cawing of the rooks, who are wheeling in large circles overhead, and wondering what is going forward in their territory—seeming, in their loud clamour, to ask what that light smoke may mean that curls so prettily amongst their old oaks, towering as if to meet the clouds. There is something very intelligent in the ways of these black people, the rooks, particularly in their wonder. I suppose it results from their numbers and their unity of purpose, a sort of collective and corporate wisdom. Yet geese congregate also; and geese never by any chance look wise. But then geese are a domestic fowl; we have spoiled them; and rooks are free commoners of nature, who use the habitations we provide for them, tenant our groves and our avenues, but never dream of becoming our subjects.

What a labyrinth of a road this is! I do not think

there are four turnings in the short half-mile between the avenue and the mill. And what a pity, as my companion observes—not that our good and jolly miller, the very representative of the old English yeomanry, should be so rich, but that one consequence of his riches should be the pulling down of the prettiest old mill that ever looked at itself in the Loddon, with the picturesque, low-browed, irregular cottage, which stood with its light-pointed roof, its clustered chimneys, and its ever-open door, looking like the real abode of comfort and hospitality, to build this huge, staring, frightful, red-brick mill, as ugly as a manufactory, and this great, square house, ugly and red to match, just behind. The old buildings always used to remind me of Wollet's beautiful engraving of a scene in the *Maid of the Mill.* It will be long before any artist will make a drawing of this. Only think of this redness in a picture! this boiled lobster of a house! Falstaff's description of Bardolph's nose would look pale in the comparison.

Here is that monstrous machine of a tilted waggon, with its load of flour, and its four fat horses. I wonder whether our horse will have the decency to get out of the way. If he does not, I am sure we cannot make him; and that enormous ship upon wheels, that ark on dry land, would roll over us like the car of Juggernaut. Really—Oh, no! there is no danger now. I should have remembered that it is my friend Samuel Long who drives the mill-team. He will take care of us. "Thank you, Samuel!" And Samuel has put us on our way, steered us safely past his waggon, escorted us over the bridge; and now, having seen us through our immediate difficulties, has

parted from us with a very civil bow and good-humoured smile, as one who is always civil and good-humoured, but with a certain triumphant masterful look in his eyes, which I have noted in men, even the best of them, when a woman gets into straits by attempting manly employments. He has done us great good, though, and may be allowed his little feeling of superiority. The parting salute he bestowed on our steed, in the shape of an astounding crack of his huge whip, has put that refractory animal on his mettle. On we go! past the glazier's pretty house, with its porch and its filbert walk; along the narrow lane bordered with elms, whose fallen leaves have made the road one yellow carpet; past that little farm-house with the horse-chestnut trees before, glowing like oranges; past the whitewashed school on the other side, gay with October roses; past the park, and the lodge, and the mansion, where once dwelt the great Earl of Clarendon—and now the rascal has began to discover that Samuel Long and his whip are a mile off, and that his mistress is driving him, and he slackens his pace accordingly. Perhaps he feels the beauty of the road just here, and goes slowly to enjoy it. Very beautiful it certainly is. The park paling forms the boundary on one side, with fine clumps of oak, and deer in all attitudes; the water, tufted with alders, flowing along on the other. Another turn, and the water winds away, succeeded by a low hedge, and a sweep of green meadows; whilst the park and its palings are replaced by a steep bank, on which stands a small, quiet, village alehouse; and higher up, embosomed in wood, is the little country church, with its sloping churchyard and its low white steeple, peeping out from amongst magnificent yew trees:—

"Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
Up-coiling, and invet'rately convolved." *

No village church was ever more happily placed. It is the very image of the peace and humbleness inculcated within its walls.

Ah! here is a higher hill rising before us, almost like a mountain. How grandly the view opens as we ascend over that wild bank, overgrown with fern, and heath, and gorse, and between those tall hollies, glowing with their coral berries! What an expanse! But we have little time to gaze at present; for that piece of perversity, our horse, who has walked over so much level ground, has now, inspired, I presume, by a desire to revisit his stable, taken it into that unaccountable noddle of his to trot up this, the very steepest hill in the county. Here we are on the top; and in five minutes we have reached the lawn gate, and are in the very midst of that beautiful piece of art or nature (I do not know to which it belongs), the pleasure-ground of F. Hill. Never was the "prophetic eye of taste" exerted with more magical skill than in these plantations. Thirty years ago this place had no existence; it was a mere undistinguished tract of field and meadow and common land; now it is a mimic forest, delighting the eye with the finest combinations of trees and shrubs, the rarest effects of form and foliage, and bewildering the mind with its green glades, and impervious recesses, and apparently interminable extent. It is the triumph of landscape gardening, and never more beautiful than in this autumn sunset, lighting up the ruddy beech and the spotted sycamore, and

* Wordsworth.

gilding the shining fir-cones that hang so thickly amongst the dark pines. The robins are singing around us, as if they too felt the magic of the hour. How gracefully the road winds through the leafy labyrinth, leading imperceptibly to the more ornamented sweep. Here we are at the door amidst geraniums, and carnations, and jasmines, still in flower. Ah! here is a flower sweeter than all, a bird gayer than the robin, the little bird that chirps to the tune of "Mamma! mamma!" the bright-faced fairy, whose tiny feet come pattering along, making a merry music, mamma's own Frances! And following her guidance, here we are in the dear round room time enough to catch the last rays of the sun, as they light the noble landscape which lies like a panorama around us, lingering longest on that long island of old thorns and stunted oaks, the oasis of B. Heath, and then vanishing in a succession of gorgeous clouds.

October 28th.—Another soft and brilliant morning. But the pleasures of to-day must be written in shorthand. I have left myself no room for notes of admiration.

First we drove about the coppice, an extensive wood of oak, and elm, and beech, chiefly the former, which adjoins the park-paling of F. Hill, of which demesne, indeed, it forms one of the most delightful parts. The roads through the coppice are studiously wild, so that they have the appearance of mere cart-tracks; and the manner in which the ground is tumbled about, the steep declivities, the sunny slopes, the sudden swells and falls, now a close, narrow valley, then a sharp ascent to an eminence commanding an immense extent of prospect, have a striking air of natural beauty, developed and heightened by the

perfection of art. All this, indeed, was familiar to me; the colouring only was new. I had been there in early spring, when the fragrant palms were on the willow, and the yellow tassels on the hazel, and every twig was swelling with renewed life; and I had been there again and again in the green leafiness of mid-summer; but never as now, when the dark verdure of the fir-plantations, hanging over the picturesque and unequal paling, partly covered with moss and ivy, contrasts so remarkably with the shining orange-leaves of the beech, already half fallen, the pale yellow of the scattering elm, the deeper and richer tints of the oak, and the glossy stems of the "lady of the woods," the delicate weeping birch. The underwood is no less picturesque. The red-spotted leaves, and redder berries of the old thorns, the scarlet festoons of the bramble, the tall fern of every hue, seem to vie with the brilliant mosaic of the ground, now covered with dead leaves and strewn with fir-cones, now, where a little glade intervenes, gay with various mosses and splendid *fungi*. How beautiful is this coppice to-day! especially where the little spring, as clear as crystal, comes bubbling out from the "old fantastic" beech root, and trickles over the grass, bright and silent as dew in a May morning. The wood-pigeons (who are just returned from their summer migration, and are cropping the ivy berries) add their low cooings, the very note of love, to the slight fluttering of the fallen leaves in the quiet air, giving a voice to the sunshine and the beauty. This coppice is a place to live and die in. But we must go. And how fine is the ascent which leads us again into the world, past those cottages hidden as in a pit, and by that hanging orchard and that rough, heathy bank!

The scenery in this one spot has a wildness, an abruptness of rise and fall rare in any part of England, rare above all in this rich and lovely but monotonous county. It is Switzerland in miniature.

And now we cross the hill to pay a morning visit to the family at the great house—another fine place, commanding another fine sweep of country. The park, studded with old trees, and sinking gently into a valley, rich in wood and water, is in the best style of ornamental landscape, though more according to the common routine of gentlemen's seats than the singularly original place which we have just left. There is, however, one distinctive beauty in the grounds of the great house—the magnificent firs which shade the terraces and surround the sweep, giving out in summer odours really Sabæan, and now in this low autumn sun producing an effect almost magical, as the huge red trunks, garlanded with ivy, stand out from the deep shadows like an army of giants. Indoors—Oh, I must not take my readers indoors, or we shall never get away!—Indoors the sunshine is brighter still; for there, in a lofty, lightsome room, sat a damsel fair and arch and *piquante*, one whom Titian or Velasquez should be born again to paint, leaning over an instrument * as sparkling and fanciful as herself, singing pretty French romances, and Scottish Jacobite songs, and all sorts of graceful and airy drolleries picked up I know not where—an English improvisatrice! a gayer Annot Lyle! whilst her sister, of a higher order of beauty, and with an earnest kindness in her smile that deepens its power, lends to the piano, as her father to the violin, an expression, a sensibility, a spirit, an

* The dital harp.

eloquence almost superhuman—almost divine! Oh, to hear these two instruments accompanying my dear companion (I forgot to say that she is a singer worthy to be so accompanied) in Haydn's exquisite canzonet, "She never told her love"—to hear her voice, with all its power, its sweetness, its gush of sound, so sustained and assisted by modulations that rivalled its intensity of expression; to hear at once such poetry, such music, such execution, is a pleasure never to be forgotten, or mixed with meaner things. I seem to hear it still.

As in the bursting springtime o'er the eye
  Of one who haunts the fields fair visions creep
  Beneath the closed lids (afore dull sleep
Dims the quick fancy) of sweet flowers that lie
On grassy banks, oxlip of orient dye,
  And palest primrose and blue violet,
  All in their fresh and dewy beauty set,
Pictured within the sense, and will not fly:
So in mine ear resounds and lives again
  One mingled melody—a voice, a pair
  Of instruments most voice-like! Of the air
Rather than of the earth seems that high strain,
A spirit's song, and worthy of the train
  That soothed old Prospero with music rare.

HANNAH BINT.

THE Shaw, leading to Hannah Bint's habitation, is, as I perhaps have said before, a very pretty mixture of wood and coppice; that is to say, a tract of thirty or forty acres covered with fine growing timber—ash, and oak, and elm, very regularly planted; and interspersed here and there with large patches of underwood, hazel, maple, birch, holly, and hawthorn, woven into almost impenetrable thickets by long wreathes of the bramble, the briony, and the brier-rose, or by the pliant and twisting garlands of the wild honeysuckle. In other parts the Shaw is quite clear of its bosky undergrowth, and clothed only with large beds of feathery fern, or carpets of flowers, primroses, orchises, cowslips, ground-ivy, crane's bill, cotton-grass, Solomon's seal, and forget-me-not, crowded together with a profusion and brilliancy of colour such as I have rarely seen equalled even in a garden. Here, so soft to the eye, the wild hyacinth really enamels the ground with its fresh and lovely purple; there,

> "On aged roots, with bright green mosses clad,
> Dwells the wood-sorrel, with its bright thin leaves
> Heart-shaped and tripley folded, and its root
> Creeping like beaded coral; whilst around

Flourish the copse's pride, anemones,
With rays like golden studs on ivory laid
Most delicate ; but touch'd with purple clouds,
Fit crown for April's fair but changeful brow."

The variety is much greater than I have enumerated ; for the ground is so unequal, now swelling in gentle accents, now dimpling into dells and hollows, and the soil so different in many parts, that the sylvan Flora is unusually extensive and complete.

The season is, however, now too late for this floweriness ; and except the tufted woodbines, which have continued in bloom during the whole of this lovely autumn, and some lingering garlands of the purple wild veitch, wreathing round the thickets, and uniting with the ruddy leaves of the bramble, and the pale festoons of the briony, there is little to call one's attention from the grander beauties of the trees—the sycamore, its broad leaves already spotted—the oak, heavy with acorns—and the delicate shining rind of the weeping birch, "the lady of the woods," thrown out in strong relief from a background of holly and hawthorn, each studded with coral berries, and backed with old beeches, beginning to assume the rich tawny hue which makes them, perhaps, the most picturesque of autumnal trees, as the transparent freshness of their young foliage is undoubtedly the choicest ornament of the forest in spring.

A sudden turn round one of these magnificent beeches brings us to the boundary of the Shaw, and leaning upon a rude gate, we look over an open space of about ten acres of ground, still more varied and broken than that which we have passed, and surrounded on all sides by thick woodland. As a piece of colour, nothing can be finer. The ruddy glow of the heath-flower, contrasting, on the one hand, with

the golden-blossomed furze—on the other, with a patch of buck-wheat, of which the bloom is not past, although the grain be ripening, the beautiful buck-wheat, whose transparent leaves and stalks are so brightly tinged with vermilion, while the delicate pink-white of the flower, a paler persicaria, has a feathery fall, at once so rich and so graceful, and a fresh and reviving odour, like that of birch trees in the dew of a May evening. The bank that surmounts this attempt at cultivation is crowned with the late foxglove and the stately mullein; the pasture of which so great a part of the waste consists, looks as green as an emerald; a clear pond, with the bright sky reflected in it, lets light into the picture; the white cottage of the keeper peeps from the opposite coppice; and the vine-covered dwelling of Hannah Bint rises from amidst the pretty garden, which lies bathed in the sunshine around it.

The living and moving accessories are all in keeping with the cheerfulness and repose of the landscape. Hannah's cow grazing quietly beside the keeper's pony; a brace of fat pointer puppies holding amicable intercourse with a litter of young pigs; ducks, geese, cocks, hens, and chickens scattered over the turf; Hannah herself sallying forth from the cottage-door, with her milk-bucket in her hand, and her little brother following with the milking-stool.

My friend Hannah Bint is by no means an ordinary person. Her father, Jack Bint (for in all his life he never arrived at the dignity of being called John—indeed, in our parts he was commonly known by the cognomen of London Jack), was a drover of high repute in his profession. No man between Salisbury Plain and Smithfield was thought to conduct a flock

of sheep so skilfully through all the difficulties of lanes and commons, streets and high-roads, as Jack Bint, aided by Jack Bint's famous dog Watch; for Watch's rough, honest face, black, with a little white about the muzzle, and one white ear, was as well known at fairs and markets as his master's equally honest and weather-beaten visage. Lucky was the dealer that could secure their services; Watch being renowned for keeping a flock together better than any shepherd's dog on the road—Jack, for delivering them more punctually, and in better condition. No man had a more thorough knowledge of the proper night stations where good feed might be produced for his charge, and good liquor for Watch and himself, Watch, like other sheep dogs, being accustomed to live chiefly on bread and beer. His master, though not averse to a pot of good double X, preferred gin; and they who plod slowly along, through wet and weary ways, in frost and in fog, have undoubtedly a stronger temptation to indulge in that cordial and reviving stimulus than we water-drinkers, sitting in warm and comfortable rooms, can readily imagine. For certain, our drover could never resist the gentle seduction of the gin-bottle, and being of a free, merry, jovial temperament, one of those persons commonly called good fellows, who like to see others happy in the same way with themselves, he was apt to circulate it at his own expense, to the great improvement of his popularity and the great detriment of his finances.

All this did vastly well whilst his earnings continued proportionate to his spendings, and the little family at home were comfortably supported by his industry: but when a rheumatic fever came on, one hard winter, and finally settled in his limbs, reducing the most

active and hardy man in the parish to the state of a confirmed cripple, then his reckless improvidence stared him in the face; and poor Jack, a thoughtless but kind creature, and a most affectionate father, looked at his three motherless children with the acute misery of a parent who has brought those whom he loves best in the world to abject destitution. He found help where he probably least expected it, in the sense and spirit of his young daughter, a girl of twelve years old.

Hannah was the eldest of the family, and had, ever since her mother's death, which event had occurred two or three years before, been accustomed to take the direction of their domestic concerns, to manage her two brothers, to feed the pigs and the poultry, and to keep house during the almost constant absence of her father. She was a quick, clever lass, of a high spirit, a firm temper, some pride, and a horror of accepting parochial relief, which is every day becoming rarer amongst the peasantry; but which forms the surest safeguard to the sturdy independence of the English character. Our little damsel possessed this quality in perfection; and when her father talked of giving up their comfortable cottage, and removing to the workhouse, whilst she and her brothers must go to service, Hannah formed a bold resolution, and without disturbing the sick man by any participation of her hopes and fears, proceeded, after settling their trifling affairs, to act at once on her own plans and designs.

Careless of the future as the poor drover had seemed, he had yet kept clear of debt, and by subscribing constantly to a benefit club, had secured a pittance that might at least assist in supporting him during the long years of sickness and helplessness to which

he was doomed to look forward. This his daughter knew. She knew also that the employer in whose service his health had suffered so severely was a rich and liberal cattle-dealer in the neighbourhood, who would willingly aid an old and faithful servant, and had, indeed, come forward with offers of money. To assistance from such a quarter Hannah saw no objection. Farmer Oakley and the parish were quite distinct things. Of him, accordingly, she asked, not money, but something much more in his own way—"A cow! any cow! old or lame, or what not, so that it were a cow! she would be bound to keep it well; if she did not, he might take it back again. She even hoped to pay for it by-and-by, by instalments, but that she would not promise!" and, partly amused, partly interested by the child's earnestness, the wealthy yeoman gave her, not as a purchase, but as a present, a very fine young Alderney. She then went to the lord of the manor, and, with equal knowledge of character, begged his permission to keep her cow on the Shaw common. "Farmer Oakley had given her a fine Alderney, and she would be bound to pay the rent, and keep her father off the parish, if he would only let it graze on the waste;" and he, too, half from real good-nature—half, not to be outdone in liberality by his tenant, not only granted the requested permission, but reduced the rent so much, that the produce of the vine seldom fails to satisfy their kind landlord.

Now Hannah showed great judgment in setting up as a dairy-woman. She could not have chosen an occupation more completely unoccupied, or more loudly called for. One of the most provoking of the petty difficulties which beset people with a small

establishment in this neighbourhood, is the trouble, almost the impossibility, of procuring the pastoral luxuries of milk, eggs, and butter, which rank, unfortunately, amongst the indispensable necessaries of housekeeping. To your thoroughbred Londoner, who, whilst grumbling over his own breakfast, is apt to fancy that thick cream, and fresh butter, and new-laid eggs grow, so to say, in the country—form an actual part of its natural produce—it may be some comfort to learn, that in this great grazing district, however the calves and the farmers may be the better for cows, nobody else is; that farmers' wives have ceased to keep poultry; and that we unlucky villagers sit down often to our first meal in a state of destitution, which may well make him content with his thin milk and his Cambridge butter, when compared to our imputed pastoralities.

Hannah's Alderney restored us to one rural privilege. Never was so cleanly a little milkmaid. She changed away some of the cottage finery, which, in his prosperous days, poor Jack had pleased himself with bringing home, the China tea-service, the gilded mugs, and the painted waiters, for the useful utensils of the dairy, and speedily established a regular and gainful trade in milk, eggs, butter, honey, and poultry—for poultry they had always kept.

Her domestic management prospered equally. Her father, who retained the perfect use of his hands, began a manufacture of mats and baskets, which he constructed with great nicety and adroitness; the eldest boy, a sharp and clever lad, cut for him his rushes and osiers; erected, under his sister's direction, a shed for the cow, and enlarged and cultivated the garden (always with the good leave of her kind patron,

the lord of the manor) until it became so ample that the produce not only kept the pig, and half kept the family, but afforded another branch of merchandise to the indefatigable directress of the establishment. For the younger boy, less quick and active, Hannah contrived to obtain an admission to the charity-school, where he made great progress—retaining him at home, however, in the hay-making and leasing season, or whenever his services could be made available, to the great annoyance of the schoolmaster, whose favourite he is, and who piques himself so much on George's scholarship (your heavy, sluggish boy at country work often turns out quick at his book), that it is the general opinion that this much-vaunted pupil will, in process of time, be promoted to the post of assistant, and may, possibly, in course of years, rise to the dignity of a parish pedagogue in his own person; so that his sister, although still making him useful at odd times, now considers George as pretty well off her hands, whilst her elder brother Tom could take an under-gardener's place directly, if he were not too important at home to be spared even for a day.

In short, during the five years that she has ruled at the Shaw cottage, the world has gone well with Hannah Bint. Her cow, her calves, her pigs, her bees, her poultry, have each in their several ways thriven and prospered. She has even brought Watch to like buttermilk as well as strong beer, and has nearly persuaded her father (to whose wants and wishes she is most anxiously attentive) to accept of milk as a substitute for gin. Not but Hannah hath had her enemies as well as her betters. Why should she not? The old woman at the lodge, who always piqued herself on being spiteful, and crying down new

ways, foretold from the first she would come to no good, and could not forgive her for falsifying her prediction; and Betty Barnes, the slatternly widow of a tippling farmer, who rented a field, and set up a cow herself, and was universally discarded for insufferable dirt, said all that the wit of an envious woman could devise against Hannah and her Alderney; nay, even Ned Miles, the keeper, her next neighbour, who had whilom held entire sway over the Shaw common, as well as its coppices, grumbled as much as so good-natured and genial a person could grumble, when he found a little girl sharing his dominion, a cow grazing beside his pony, and vulgar cocks and hens hovering around the buck-wheat destined to feed his noble pheasants. Nobody that had been accustomed to see that paragon of keepers, so tall, and manly, and pleasant looking, with his merry eye, and his knowing smile, striding gaily along, in his green coat and his gold laced hat, with Neptune, his noble Newfoundland dog (a retriever is the sporting word), and his beautiful spaniel, Flirt, at his heels, could conceive how askew he looked when he first found Hannah and Watch holding equal reign over his old territory, the Shaw common.

Yes! Hannah hath had her enemies; but they are passing away. The old woman at the lodge is dead, poor creature; and Betty Barnes, having herself taken to tippling, has lost the few friends she once possessed, and looks, luckless wretch, as if she would soon die too!—and the keeper?—why, he is not dead, or like to die; but the change that has taken place there is the most astonishing of all—except, perhaps, the change in Hannah herself.

Few damsels of twelve years old, generally a very

HANNAH BINT'S BYRE.—*Page* 127.

pretty age, were less pretty than Hannah Bint. Short and stunted in her figure, thin in face, sharp in feature, with a muddled complexion, wild sun-burnt hair, and eyes whose very brightness had in them something startling, over-informed, super-subtle, too clever for her age—at twelve years old she had quite the airs of a little old fairy. Now, at seventeen, matters are mended. Her complexion has cleared; her countenance has developed itself; her figure has shot up into height and lightness, and a sort of rustic grace; her bright, acute eye is softened and sweetened by the womanly wish to please; her hair is trimmed, and curled, and brushed, with exquisite neatness; and her whole dress arranged with that nice attention to the becoming, the suitable both in form and texture, which would be called the highest degree of coquetry, if it did not deserve the better name of propriety. Never was such a transmogrification beheld. The lass is really pretty, and Ned Miles has discovered that she is so. There he stands, the rogue, close at her side (for he hath joined her whilst we have been telling her little story, and the milking is over!)—there he stands—holding her milk-pail in one hand, and stroking Watch with the other; while she is returning the compliment by patting Neptune's magnificent head. There they stand, as much like lovers as may be; he smiling, and she blushing—he never looking so handsome nor she so pretty in all their lives. There they stand, in blessed forgetfulness of all except each other; as happy a couple as ever trod the earth. There they stand, and one would not disturb them for all the milk and butter in Christendom. I should not wonder if they were fixing the wedding-day.

THE FALL OF THE LEAF.

NOVEMBER 6th.—The weather is as peaceful to-day, as calm, and as mild, as in early April; and, perhaps, an autumn afternoon and a spring morning do resemble each other more in feeling, and even in appearance, than in any two periods of the year. There is in both the same freshness and dewiness of the herbage; the same balmy softness in the air; and the same pure and lovely blue sky, with white fleecy clouds floating across it. The chief difference lies in the absence of flowers and the presence of leaves. But then the foliage of November is so rich, and glowing, and varied, that it may well supply the place of the gay blossoms of the spring; whilst all the flowers of the field or the garden could never make amends for the want of leaves—that beautiful and graceful attire in which nature has clothed the rugged forms of trees—the verdant drapery to which the landscape owes its loveliness and the forests their glory.

If choice must be between two seasons, each so full of charm, it is at least no bad philosophy to prefer the present good, even whilst looking gratefully back, and hopefully forward, to the past and the future. And

of a surety, no fairer specimen of a November day could well be found than this—a day made to wander

> "By yellow commons and birch-shaded hollows,
> And hedge-rows bordering unfrequented lanes;"

nor could a prettier country be found for our walk than this shady and yet sunny Berkshire, where the scenery, without rising into grandeur or breaking into wildness, is so peaceful, so cheerful, so varied, and so thoroughly English.

We must bend our steps towards the water side, for I have a message to leave at Farmer Riley's: and sooth to say, it is no unpleasant necessity; for the road thither is smooth and dry, retired, as one likes a country walk to be, but not too lonely, which women never like; leading past the Loddon—the bright, brimming, transparent Loddon—a fitting mirror for this bright blue sky, and terminating at one of the prettiest and most comfortable farm-houses in the neighbourhood.

How beautiful the lane is to-day, decorated with a thousand colours! The brown road, and the rich verdure that borders it, strewed with the pale yellow leaves of the elm, just beginning to fall; hedge-rows glowing with long wreaths of the bramble in every variety of purplish red; and overhead the unchanged green of the fir, contrasting with the spotted sycamore, the tawny beech, and the dry sere leaves of the oak, which rustle as the light wind passes through them; a few common hardy yellow flowers (for yellow is the common colour of flowers, whether wild or cultivated, as blue is the rare one), flowers of many sorts, but almost of one tint, still blowing in spite of the season,

and ruddy berries glowing through all. How very beautiful is the lane!

And how pleasant is this hill where the road widens, with the group of cattle by the wayside, and George Hearn, the little post-boy, trundling his hoop at full speed, making all the better haste in his work because he cheats himself into thinking it play! And how beautiful again is this patch of common at the hill-top with the clear pool, where Martha Pither's children—elves of three, and four, and five years old—without any distinction of sex in their sunburnt faces and tattered drapery, are dipping up water in their little homely cups shining with cleanliness, and a small brown pitcher with the lip broken, to fill that great kettle, which, when it is filled, their united strength will never be able to lift! They are quite a group for a painter, with their rosy cheeks, and chubby hands, and round merry faces; and the low cottage in the background, peeping out of its vine leaves and china roses, with Martha at the door, tidy, and comely, and smiling, preparing the potatoes for the pot, and watching the progress of dipping and filling that useful utensil, completes the picture.

But we must go on. No time for more sketches in those short days. It is getting cold too. We must proceed in our walk. Dash is showing us the way, and beating the thick double hedge-row that runs along the side of the meadow, at a rate that indicates game astir, and causes the leaves to fly as fast as an east wind after a hard frost Ah! a pheasant! a superb cock pheasant! Nothing is more certain than Dash's questing, whether in a hedge-row or covert, for a better spaniel never went into the field; but I fancied that it was a hare afoot, and was

also as much startled to hear the whirring of those splendid wings as the princely bird himself would have been at the report of a gun. Indeed, I believe that the way in which a pheasant goes off does sometimes make young sportsmen a little nervous (they don't own it very readily, but the observation may be relied on nevertheless), until they get, as it were, broken-in to the sound; and then that grand and sudden burst of wing becomes as pleasant to them as it seems to be to Dash, who is beating the hedge-row with might and main, and giving tongue louder, and sending the leaves about faster than ever—very proud of finding the pheasant, and perhaps a little angry with me for not shooting it; at least looking as if he would be angry if I were a man; for Dash is a dog of great sagacity, and has doubtless not lived four years in the sporting world without making the discovery, that although gentlemen do shoot, ladies do not.

The Loddon at last! the beautiful Loddon! and the bridge, where every one stops, as by instinct, to lean over the rails, and gaze a moment on a landscape of surpassing loveliness—the fine grounds of the Great House, with their magnificent groups of limes, and firs, and poplars grander than ever poplars were; the green meadows opposite, studded with oaks and elms; the clear winding river; the mill with its picturesque old buildings bounding the scene; all glowing with the rich colouring of autumn, and harmonised by the soft beauty of the clear blue sky, and the delicious calmness of the hour. The very peasant whose daily path it is cannot cross the bridge without a pause.

But the day is wearing fast, and it grows colder

and colder. I really think it will be a frost. After all, spring is the pleasantest season, beautiful as this scenery is. We must get on. Down that broad yet shadowy lane, between the park, dark with evergreens and dappled with deer, and the meadows where sheep, and cows, and horses are grazing under the tall elms; that lane, where the wild bank, clothed with fern and tufted with furze, and crowned by rich berried thorn and thick shining holly, on the one side, seems to vie in beauty with the picturesque old paling, the bright laurels, and the plumy cedars, on the other; down that shady lane, until the sudden turn brings us to an opening where four roads meet, where a noble avenue turns down to the Great House; where the village church rears its modest spire from amidst its venerable yew trees: and where, embosomed in orchards and gardens, and backed by barns and ricks, and all the wealth of the farm-yard, stands the spacious and comfortable abode of good Farmer Riley—the end and object of our walk.

And in happy time the message is said and the answer given, for this beautiful mild day is edging off into a dense frosty evening; the leaves of the elm and the linden in the old avenue are quivering and vibrating and fluttering in the air, and at length falling crisply on the earth, as if Dash were beating for pheasants in the tree-tops; the sun gleams dimly through the fog, giving little more of light and heat than his fair sister the lady moon—I don't know a more disappointing person than a cold sun; and I am beginning to wrap my cloak closely round me, and to calculate the distance to my own fireside, recanting all the way my praises of November, and longing for the showery, flowery April, as much as if I were a half-

chilled butterfly, or a dahlia knocked down by the frost.

Ah, dear me! what a climate this is, that one cannot keep in the same mind about it for half-an-hour together! I wonder, by-the-way, whether the fault is in the weather, which Dash does not seem to care for, or in me? If I should happen to be wet through in a shower next spring, and should catch myself longing for autumn, that would settle the question.

II.

RURAL SCENES AND SCENERY.

A GREAT FARM-HOUSE.

THESE are bad times for farmers. I am sorry for it. Independently of all questions of policy, as a mere matter of taste and of old association, it is a fine thing to witness the hospitality and to think of the social happiness of a great farm-house. No situation in life seemed so richly privileged; none had so much power for good and so little for evil; it seemed a place where pride could not live and poverty could not enter. These thoughts pressed on my mind the other day in passing the green sheltered lane, overhung with trees like an avenue, that leads to the great farm at M., where ten or twelve years ago I used to spend so many pleasant days. I could not help advancing a few paces up the lane, and then turning to lean over the gate, seemingly gazing on the rich undulating valley crowned with woody hills, which, as I stood under the dark and shady arch, lay bathed in the sunshine before me, but really absorbed in

thoughts of other times, in recollections of the old delights of that delightful place, and of the admirable qualities of its owners. How often had I opened the gate, and how gaily—certain of meeting a smiling welcome—and what a picture of comfort it was!

Passing up the lane we used first to encounter a thick solid suburb of ricks of all sorts, shapes, and dimensions. Then came the farm, like a town; a magnificent series of buildings, stables, cart-houses, cow-houses, granaries, and barns, that might hold half the corn of the parish, placed at all angles towards each other, and mixed with smaller habitations for pigs, dogs, and poultry. They formed, together with the old substantial farm-house, a sort of amphitheatre, looking over a beautiful meadow, which swept greenly and abruptly down into fertile enclosures, richly set with hedge-row timber, oak, and ash, and elm. Both the meadow and farm-yard swarmed with inhabitants of the earth and of the air; horses, oxen, cows, calves, heifers, sheep, and pigs; beautiful greyhounds, all manner of poultry, a tame goat, and a pet donkey.

The master of this land of plenty was well fitted to preside over it; a thick, stout man of middle height, and middle aged, with a healthy, ruddy, square face, all alive with intelligence and good-humour. There was a lurking jest in his eye, and a smile about the corners of his firmly closed lips, that gave assurance of good-fellowship. His voice was loud enough to have hailed a ship at sea, without the assistance of a speaking-trumpet, wonderfully rich and round in its tones, and harmonising admirably with his bluff, jovial visage. He wore his dark shining hair combed straight over his forehead, and had a trick, when

particularly merry, of stroking it down with his hand. The moment his hand approached his head, out flew a jest.

Besides his own great farm, the business of which seemed to go on like machinery, always regular, prosperous, and unfailing—besides this, and two or three constant stewardships, and a perpetual succession of arbitrations, in which, such was the influence of his acuteness, his temper, and his sturdy justice, that he was often named by both parties, and left to decide alone—in addition to those occupations he was a sort of standing overseer and churchwarden; he ruled his own hamlet like a despotic monarch, and took a prime minister's share in the government of the large parish to which it was attached; and one of the gentlemen whose estates he managed, being the independent member of an independent borough, he had every now and then a contested election on his shoulders. Even that did not discompose him. He had always leisure to receive his friends at home, or to visit them abroad; to take journeys to London, or make excursions to the seaside; was as punctual in pleasure as in business, and thought being happy and making happy as much the purpose of his life as getting rich. His great amusement was coursing. He kept several brace of capital greyhounds, so high-blooded, that I remember when five of them were confined in five different kennels on account of their ferocity. The greatest of living painters once called a greyhound, "the line of beauty in perpetual motion." Our friend's large dogs were a fine illustration of this remark. His old dog, Hector, for instance, for whom he refused a hundred guineas—what a superb dog was Hector!—a model of grace and symmetry,

necked and crested like an Arabian, and bearing himself with a stateliness and gallantry which showed some "conscience of his worth." He was the largest dog I ever saw; but so finely proportioned, that the most determined fault-finder could call him neither too long nor too heavy. There was not an inch too much of him. His colour was the purest white, entirely unspotted, except that his head was very regularly and richly marked with black. Hector was certainly a perfect beauty. But the little bitches, on which his master piqued himself still more, were not in my poor judgment so admirable. They were pretty little round, graceful things, sleek and glossy, and for the most part milk-white, with the smallest heads, and the most dove-like eyes that were ever seen. There was a peculiar sort of innocent beauty about them, like that of a roly-poly child. They were as gentle as lambs too: all the evil spirit of the family evaporated in the gentlemen. But, to my thinking, these pretty creatures were fitter for the parlour than the field. They were strong, certainly, excellently loined, cat-footed, and chested like a war-horse; but there was a want of length about them—a want of room, as the coursers say; something a little, a very little, inclined to the clumsy; a dumpiness, a pointer-look. They went off like an arrow from a bow; for the first hundred yards nothing could stand against them; then they began to flag, to find their weight too much for their speed, and to lose ground from the shortness of the stroke. Up-hill, however, they were capital. There their compactness told. They turned with the hare, and lost neither wind nor way in the sharpest ascent. I shall never forget one single-handed course of our good friend's favourite little

bitch Helen, on W. hill. All the coursers were in the valley below, looking up the hillside as on a moving picture. I suppose she turned the hare twenty times on a piece of greensward not much bigger than an acre, and as steep as the roof of a house. It was an old hare, a famous hare, one that had baffled half the dogs in the country; but she killed him; and then, though almost as large as herself, took it up in her mouth, brought it to her master, and laid it down at his feet. Oh, how pleased he was! and what a pleasure it was to see his triumph! He did not always find W. hill so fortunate. It is a high steep hill, of a conical shape, encircled by a mountain road winding up to the summit like a corkscrew—a deep road dug out of the chalk, and fenced by high mounds on either side. The hares always make for this hollow way, as it is called, because it is too wide for a leap, and the dogs lose much time in mounting and descending the sharp acclivities. Very eager dogs, however, will sometimes dare the leap, and two of our good friend's favourite greyhounds perished in the attempt in two following years. They were found dead in the hollow way. After this he took a dislike to coursing meetings, and sported chiefly on his own beautiful farm.

His wife was like her husband, with a difference, as they say in heraldry. Like him in looks, only thinner and paler; like him in voice and phrase, only not so loud; like him in merriment and good-humour; like him in her talent of welcoming and making happy, and being kind; like him in cherishing an abundance of pets, and in getting through with marvellous facility an astounding quantity of business and pleasure. Perhaps the quality in which they resembled each other most completely was the happy

ease and serenity of behaviour, so seldom found amongst people of the middle rank, who have usually a best manner and a worst, and whose best (that is, the studied, the company manner) is so very much the worst. She was frankness itself; entirely free from prickly defiance or bristling self-love. She never took offence or gave it; never thought of herself or of what others would think of her; had never been afflicted with the besetting sins of her station, a dread of the vulgar, or an aspiration of the genteel. Those "words of fear" had never disturbed her delightful heartiness.

Her pets were her cows, her poultry, her bees, and her flowers; chiefly her poultry, almost as numerous as the bees, and as various as the flowers. The farm-yard swarmed with peacocks, turkeys, geese, tame and wild ducks, fowls, guinea-hens, and pigeons; besides a brood or two of favourite bantams in the green court before the door, with a little ridiculous strutter of a cock at their head, who imitated the magnificent demeanour of the great Tom of the barn-yard, just as Tom in his turn copied the fierce bearing of that warlike and terrible biped, the he-turkey. I am the least in the world afraid of a turkey-cock, and used to steer clear of the turkery as often as I could. Commend me to the peaceable vanity of that jewel of a bird, the peacock, sweeping his gorgeous tail along the grass, or dropping it gracefully from some low-boughed tree, whilst he turns round his crested head with the air of a birthday belle, to see who admires him. What a glorious creature it is! How thoroughly content with himself, and with all the world!

Next to her poultry our good farmer's wife loved

her flower-garden; and, indeed, it was of the very first water, the only thing about the place that was fine. She was a real, genuine florist; valued pinks, tulips, and auriculas, for certain qualities of shape and colour, with which beauty has nothing to do; preferred black ranunculuses, and gave in to all those obliquities of a triple-refined taste by which the professed florist contrives to keep pace with the vagaries of the Bibliomaniac. Of all odd fashions, that of dark, gloomy, dingy flowers, appears to me the oddest. Your true *connoisseurs* now shall prefer a deep puce hollyhock to the gay pink blossoms which cluster round that splendid plant like a pyramid of roses. So did she. The nomenclature of her garden was more distressing still. One is never thoroughly sociable with flowers till they are naturalised, as it were, christened, provided with decent, homely, well-wearing English names. Now her plants had all sorts of heathenish appellations, which—no offence to her learning—always sounded wrong. I liked the bees' garden best; the plot of ground immediately round their hives, filled with common flowers for their use, and literally "redolent of sweets." Bees are insects of great taste in every way, and seem often to select for beauty as much as for flavour. They have a better eye for colour than the florist. The butterfly is also a *dilettante*. Rover though he be, he generally prefers the blossoms that become him best. What a pretty picture it is, in a sunshiny autumn day, to see a bright spotted butterfly, made up of gold and purple and splendid brown, swinging on the rich flower of the china-aster!

To come back to our farm. Within doors everything went as well as without. There were no fine

misses sitting before the piano, and mixing the alloy of their new-fangled tinsel with the old sterling metal; nothing but an only son, excellently brought up, a fair, slim youth, whose extraordinary and somewhat pensive elegance of mind and manner was thrown into fine relief by his father's loud hilarity, and harmonised delightfully with the smiling kindness of his mother. His Spensers and Thomsons, too, looked well amongst the hyacinths and geraniums that filled the windows of the little snug room in which they usually sat; a sort of after-thought, built at an angle from the house, and looking into the farm-yard. It was closely packed with favourite arm-chairs, favourite sofas, favourite tables, and a side-board decorated with the prize-cups and collars of the greyhounds, and generally loaded with substantial work-baskets, jars of flowers, great pyramids of home-made cakes, and sparkling bottles of gooseberry wine, famous all over the country. The walls were covered with portraits of half-a-dozen greyhounds, a brace of spaniels as large as life, an old pony, and the master and mistress of the house in half-length. She as unlike as possible, prim, mincing, delicate, in lace and satin; he so staringly and ridiculously like, that when the picture fixed its good-humoured eyes upon you as you entered the room, you were almost tempted to say—How d'ye do!——Alas! the portraits are now gone, and the originals. Death and distance have despoiled that pleasant home. The garden has lost its smiling mistress; the greyhounds their kind master; and new people, new manners, and new cares, have taken possession of the old abode of peace and plenty—the great farm-house.

BRAMLEY MAYING.

MR. GEOFFREY CRAYON has, in his delightful but somewhat fanciful writings, brought into general view many old sports and customs, some of which, indeed, still linger about the remote counties, familiar as local peculiarities to their inhabitants, whilst the greater part lie buried in books of the Elizabethan age, known only to the curious in English literature. One rural custom which would have enchanted him, and which prevails in the north of Hampshire, he has not noticed, and probably does not know. Did any of my readers ever hear of a Maying? Let not any notions of chimney-sweeps soil the imagination of the gay Londoner! A country Maying is altogether a different affair from the street exhibitions which mix so much pity with our mirth, and do the heart good, perhaps, but not by gladdening it. A country Maying is a meeting of the lads and lasses of two or three parishes, who assemble in certain erections of green boughs called May-houses, to dance and—but I am going to tell all about it in due order, and must not forestall my description.

Last year we went to Bramley Maying. There had been two or three such merry-makings before in that inaccessible neighbourhood, where the distance

from large towns, the absence of great houses, and the consequent want of all decent roads, together with a country of peculiar wildness and beauty, combined to produce a sort of modern Arcadia. We had intended to assist at a Maying in the forest of Pamber, thinking that the deep glades of that fine woodland scenery would be more congenial to the spirit of our English merriment, as it breathed more of Robin Hood and Maid Marian than a mere village green—to say nothing of its being of the two more accessible by four-footed and two-wheeled conveyances. But the Pamber day had been suffered to pass, and Bramley was the last Maying of the season. So to Bramley we went.

As we had a considerable distance to go, we set out about noon, intending to return to dinner at six. Never was a day more congenial to a happy purpose. It was a day made for country weddings and dances on the green—a day of dazzling light, of ardent sunshine falling on hedge-rows and meadows fresh with spring showers. You might almost see the grass grow and the leaves expand under the influence of that vivifying warmth; and we passed through the well-known and beautiful scenery of W. Park, and the pretty village of M., with a feeling of new admiration, as if we had never before felt their charms; so gloriously did the trees in their young leaves, the grass springing beneath them, the patches of golden broom and deeper furze, the cottages covered with roses, the blooming orchards, and the light snowy sprays of the cherry trees tossing their fair blossoms across the deep blue sky, pour upon the eye the full magic of colour. On we passed gaily and happily as far as we knew our way—perhaps a little further,

for the place of our destination was new to both of us, when we had the luck, good or bad, to meet with a director in the person of the butcher of M. My companion is known to most people within a circuit of ten miles; so we had ready attention and most civil guidance from the man of beef and mutton—a prodigious person, almost as big as a prize ox, as rosy and jovial-looking as Falstaff himself, who was standing in the road with a slender shrewd-looking boy, apt and ready enough to have passed for the page. He soon gave us the proper, customary, and unintelligible directions as to the lanes and turnings —first to the right, then to the left, then round Farmer Jennings' close, then across the Holy Brook, then to the right again—till at last, seeing us completely bewildered, he offered to send the boy, who was going our way for half-a-mile to carry out a shoulder of veal, to attend us to that distance as a guide; an offer gratefully accepted by all parties, especially the lad, whom we relieved of his burden and took up behind, where he swung in an odd but apparently satisfactory posture, between running and riding. While he continued with us we fell into no mistakes; but at last he and the shoulder of veal reached their place of destination; and after listening to a repetition, or perhaps a variation, of the turns right and left which were to conduct us to Bramley-green, we and our little guide parted.

On we went, twisting and turning through a labyrinth of lanes, getting deeper and deeper every moment, till at last, after many doubtings, we became fairly convinced that we had lost our way. Not a soul was in the fields; not a passenger in the road; not a cottage by the road-side: so on we went—I am

afraid to say how far (for when people have lost their way they are not the most accurate measurers of distance)—till we came suddenly on a small farm-house, and saw at once that the road we had trodden led to that farm, and thither only. The solitary farm-house had one solitary inmate, a smiling middle-aged woman, who came to us and offered her services with the most alert civility :—"All her boys and girls were gone to the Maying," she said, "and she remained to keep house."—"The Maying! We are near Bramley, then?"—"Only two miles the nearest way across the field—were we going?—she would see to the horse—we should soon be there, only over that stile, and then across that field, and then turn to the right, and then take the next turning—no! the next but one to the left."—Right and left again for two miles over those deserted fields!—Right and left! we shuddered at the words. "Is there no carriage-road?—Where are we?" —"At Silchester, close to the walls, only half-a-mile from the church."—"At Silchester!" and in ten minutes we had said a thankful farewell to our kind informant, had retraced our steps a little, had turned up another lane, and found ourselves at the foot of that commanding spot which antiquaries call the amphitheatre, close under the walls of the Roman city, and in full view of an old acquaintance, the schoolmaster of Silchester, who happened to be there in his full glory, playing the part of Cicerone to a party of ladies, and explaining far more than he knows, or than any one knows, of streets, and gates, and sites of temples, which, by-the-by, the worthy pedagogue usually calls parish churches. I never was so glad to see him in my life, never thought he could have spoken with so much sense and eloquence as were comprised

in the two words, "straight forward," by which he answered our inquiry as to the road to Bramley.

And forward we went by a way beautiful beyond description: a road bounded on one side by every variety of meadow, and corn-field, and rich woodland; on the other, by the rock-like walls of the old city, crowning an abrupt, magnificent bank of turf, broken by fragments, crags, as it were, detached from the ruin, and young trees, principally ash, with silver stems standing out in picturesque relief from the green slope, and itself crowned with every sort of vegetation, from the rich festoons of briar and ivy which garlanded its side to the venerable oaks and beeches which nodded on its summit. I never saw anything so fine in my life. To be sure, we nearly broke our necks. Even I, who, having been overset astonishingly often, without any harm happening, have acquired, from frequency of escape, the confidence of escaping, and the habit of not caring for that particular danger, which is, I suppose, what in a man, and in battle, would be called courage; even I was glad enough to get out, and do all I could towards wriggling the gig round the rock-like stones, or sometimes helping to lift the wheel over the smaller impediments. We escaped that danger, and left the venerable walls behind us.—But I am losing my way here, too; I must loiter on the road no longer. Our other delays of a broken bridge—a bog —another wrong turning—and a meeting with a loaded waggon, in a lane too narrow to pass—all this must remain untold.

At last we reached a large farm-house at Bramley; another mile remained to the green, but that was impassable. Nobody thinks of riding at Bramley.

The late lady of the manor, when at rare and uncertain intervals she resided for a few weeks at her house of B. R., used, in visiting her only neighbour, to drive her coach and four through her farmer's ploughed fields. We must walk: but the appearance of gay crowds of rustics, all passing along one path, gave assurance that this time we should not lose our way. Oh, what a pretty path it was! along one sunny sloping field, up and down, dotted with trees like a park; then across a deep shady lane, with cows loitering and cropping grass from the banks; then up a long narrow meadow, in the very pride and vigour of its greenness, richly bordered by hedgerow timber, and terminating in the churchyard and a little country church.

Bramley church is well worth seeing. It contains that rare thing, a monument fine in itself, and finer in its situation. We had heard of it, and in spite of the many delays we had experienced, could not resist the temptation of sending one of the loiterers, who seemed to stand in the churchyard as a sort of out-guard to the Maying, to the vicar's house for the key. Prepared as we had been to see something unusual, we were very much struck. The church is small, simple, decaying, almost ruinous; but as you turn from the entrance into the centre aisle, and advance up to the altar, your eye falls on a lofty recess, branching out like a chapel on one side, and seen through a Gothic arch. It is almost paved with monumental brasses of the proud family of B., who have possessed the surrounding property from the time of the Conqueror; and in the centre of the large open space stands a large monument, surrounded by steps, on which reclines the figure of a dying man,

with a beautiful woman leaning over him, full of a lovely look of anxiety and tenderness. The figures are very fine; but that which makes the grace and glory of this remarkable piece of sculpture, is its being backed by an immense Gothic window, nearly the whole size of the recess, entirely composed of old stained glass. I do not know the story which the artist, in the series of pictures, intended to represent; but there they are, the gorgeous, glorious colours—reds, and purples, and greens, glowing like an anemone bed in the sunshine, or like one of the windows made of amethysts and rubies in the Arabian Tales, and throwing out the monumental figures with an effect almost magical. The parish clerk was at the Maying, and we had only an unlettered rustic to conduct us, so that I do not even know the name of the sculptor—he must have a strange mingled feeling if ever he saw his work in its present home—delight that it looks so well, and regret that there is no one to look at it. That monument alone was worth losing our way for.

But across two fields more, and up a quiet lane, and we are at the Maying, announced afar off by the merry sound of music, and the merrier clatter of childish voices. Here we are at the green—a little turfy spot, where three roads meet, close shut in by hedge-rows, with a pretty white cottage, and its long slip of garden at one angle. I had no expectation of scenery so compact, so like a glade in a forest; it is quite a cabinet picture, with green trees for the frame. In the midst grows a superb horse-chestnut, in the full glory of its flowery pyramids, and from the trunk of the chestnut the May-houses commence. They are covered alleys built of green boughs, decorated with

garlands and great bunches of flowers, the gayest that blow—lilacs, Guelder-roses, peonies, tulips, stocks—hanging down like chandeliers among the dancers; for of dancers, gay, dark-eyed young girls in straw bonnets and white gowns, and their lovers in their Sunday attire, the May-houses were full. The girls had mostly the look of extreme youth, and danced well and quietly like ladies—too much so: I should have been glad to see less elegance and more enjoyment; and their partners, though not altogether so graceful, were as decorous and as indifferent as real gentlemen. It was quite like a ball-room, as pretty and almost as dull. Outside was the fun. It is the outside, the upper gallery of the world, that has that good thing. There were children laughing, eating, trying to cheat, and being cheated, round an ancient and practised vendor of oranges and gingerbread; and on the other side of the tree lay a merry group of old men, in coats almost as old as themselves, and young ones in no coats at all, excluded from the dance by the disgrace of a smock-frock. Who would have thought of etiquette finding its way into the May-houses! That group would have suited Teniers; it smoked and drank a little, but it laughed a great deal more. There were a few decent, matronly-looking women, too, sitting in a cluster; and young mothers strolling about with infants in their arms; and ragged boys peeping through the boughs at the dancers. Oh, what a pretty sight it was! worth losing our way for—worth losing our dinner—both which events happened; whilst a party of friends, who were to have joined us, were far more unlucky; for they not only lost their way and their dinner, but rambled all day about the country, and never reached Bramley Maying.

III.

THE CHILDREN OF THE VILLAGE.

AMY LLOYD.

ONE fine sunshiny March morning a lady, driving herself in a pony-carriage through Aberleigh lane, stopped beside a steep bank to look at a little girl and her dog in the adjoining field. The hedge had been closely cut, except where a tuft of hazel with its long tassels hung over some broom in full flower, and a straggling bush of the white-blossomed sloe was mixed with some branches of palms, from which the bees were already gathering honey. The little girl was almost as busy as the bees; she was gathering violets, white violets and blue, with which the sunny bank was covered, and her little dog was barking at a flock of sheep feeding in that part of the field, for it was a turnip field, that was hurdled off for their use. The dog was a small French spaniel, one of the prettiest ever seen, with long curly hair, snow white, except that the ears and three or four spots on the body were yellow; large feathered feet, and bright black eyes:

just the sort of dog of which fine ladies love to make pets.

It was curious to see this beautiful little creature driving before it a great flock of sheep, ewes, lambs, and all—for sheep are sad cowards! And then, when driven to the hurdles, the sheep, cowards though they were, were forced to turn about; how they would take courage at sight of their enemy, advancing a step or two and pretending to look brave; then it was diverting to see how the little spaniel, frightened itself, would draw back barking towards its mistress, almost as sad a coward as the sheep. The lady sat watching their proceedings with great amusement, and at last addressed the little girl, a nice lass of ten years old in deep mourning.

"Whose pretty little dog is that, my dear?" asked the lady.

"Mine, madam," was the answer.

"And where did you get it? The breed is not common."

"It belonged to my poor mamma. Poor papa brought it from France." And the look and the tone told at once poor Amy was an orphan.

"And you and the pretty dog—what's its name?" said the lady, interrupting herself.

"Flossy, ma'am—dear Flossy!" And Amy stooped to stroke the curly, silky, glossy coat which had probably gained Flossy his appellation; and Flossy in return jumped on his young mistress, and danced about her with tenfold glee.

"You and Flossy live hereabout?" inquired the lady.

"Close by, ma'am: at Court farm, with my uncle and aunt Lloyd."

"And you love Flossy?" resumed the lady. 'You would not like to part with him?"

"Part with Floss!" cried Amy. "Part with my own Flossy!"—and she flung down her violets, and caught her faithful pet in her arms, as if fearful of its being snatched away; and Floss, as if partaking of the fear, nestled up to his young mistress, and pressed his head against her cheek.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear," replied the lady, preparing to drive on; "I am not going to steal your favourite, but I would give five guineas for a dog like him; and if ever you meet with such a one, you have only to send it to Lumley Castle. I am Lady Lumley," added she. "Good morning, love! Farewell, Flossy!" And, with a kind nod, the lady and the pony-chaise passed rapidly by; and Amy and Flossy returned to Court farm.

Amy was an orphan, and had only lately come to live with her good uncle and aunt Lloyd, rough, honest country people; and being a shy, meek-spirited child, who had just lost most affectionate parents, and had been used to soft voices and gentle manners, was so frightened at the loud speech of the farmer and the blunt ways of his wife, that she ran away from them as often as she could, and felt as forlorn and desolate as any little girl can do who has early learnt the blessed lesson of reliance on the Father of all. Her chief comfort at Court farm was to pet Flossy and to talk to old Dame Clewer, the charwoman, who had been her own mother's nurse.

Dame Clewer had known better days; but having married late in life, and been soon left a widow, she had toiled early and late to bring up an only son; and all her little earnings had gone to apprentice him

to a carpenter, and keep him decently clothed ; and he, although rather lively and thoughtless, was a dutiful and grateful son, and being now just out of his time, had gone to the next town to try to get work, and hoped to repay his good mother all her care and kindness by supporting her out of his earnings. He had told his mother so when setting off the week before, and she had repeated it with tears in her eyes to Amy —tears of joy ; and Amy on her return to the house went immediately in search of her old friend, whom she knew to be washing there, partly to hear over again the story of Thomas Clewer's goodness, partly to tell her own adventure with Lady Lumley.

In the drying yard, as she expected, Amy found Dame Clewer ; not, however, as she expected, smiling, and busy, and delighted to see Miss Amy, but sitting on the ground by the side of the clothes-basket, her head buried in her hands, and sobbing as if her heart would break. "What could be the matter? Why did she cry so?" asked Amy. And Dame Clewer, unable to resist the kind interest evinced by the affectionate child, told her briefly the cause of her distress.—"Thomas had enlisted!" How few words may convey a great sorrow!—"Thomas has gone for a soldier!"—And the poor mother flung herself at her length on the ground, and gasped and sobbed as though she would never speak again.

"Gone for a soldier!" exclaimed Amy—"Left you! Oh, he never can be so cruel, so wicked! He'll come back, dear nurse!" (for Amy always called Dame Clewer nurse, as her mother had been used to do). "He'll be sure to come back ; Thomas is such a good son, with all his wildness. He'll come back—I know he will."

"He can't!" replied poor nurse, trying to rouse herself from her misery. "He can't come, how much soever he may wish it; they'll not let him. Nothing can get him off but money, and I have none to give." And again the mother's tears choked her words. "My poor boy must go!"

"Money?" said Amy; "I have half-a-crown that god-mamma gave me, and two shillings and three sixpences; I'll go and fetch them in a moment."

"Blessings on your dear heart!" sobbed Dame Clewer; "your little money would be of no use. The soldier who came to tell me offered to get him off for five pounds; but where am I to get five pounds? All my goods and all my clothes would not raise near such a sum: and even if anybody was willing to lend money to a poor old creature like me, how should I ever be able to pay it? No; Thomas must go—go to the East Indies, as the soldier said, to be killed by the sword or to die of the fever!—I shall never see his dear face again! Never!" And turning resolutely from the pitying child, she bent over the clothes in the basket, trying to unfold them with her trembling hands and to hang them out to dry; but unable in her agony to separate the wet linen, she burst into a passion of tears, and stood leaning against the clothes' line, which quivered and vibrated at every sob, as if sensible of the poor mother's misery.

Amy, on her part, sat on the steps leading to the house, watching her in silent pity. "Oh, if mamma were alive!" thought the little girl—"or papa! or if I dared ask aunt Lloyd! or if I had the money of my own; or anything that would fetch the money!" And just as she was thinking this very thought, Floss, wondering to see his little mistress so still and

sad, crept up to her, and put his paw in her lap and whined. "Dear Floss!" said Amy, unconsciously, and then suddenly remembering what Lady Lumley had said to her, she took the dog up in her arms, and coloured like scarlet, from a mingled emotion of pleasure and pain, for Flossy had been her own mamma's dog, and Amy loved him dearly. For full five minutes she sat hugging Flossy and kissing his sleek shining head, whilst the faithful creature licked her cheeks and her hands, and nestled up to her bosom, and strove all he could to prove his gratitude, and return her caresses. For full five minutes she sat without speaking; at last she went to Dame Clewer, and gave the dog into her arms.

"Lady Lumley offered me five guineas for Flossy this morning," said she; "take him, dear nurse, and take the money; but beg her to be kind to him," continued poor Amy, no longer able to restrain her tears—"beg her to be very kind to my Floss!" And, with a heart too full even to listen to the thanks and blessings which the happy mother was showering upon her head, the little girl turned away.

But did Lady Lumley buy Flossy? And was Thomas Clewer discharged? Yes, Thomas was discharged, for Sir John Lumley spoke to his colonel; and he returned to his home and his fond mother. Lady Lumley did not buy Floss, because, as she said, however she might like him, she never could bear to deprive so good a girl as Amy of anything that gave her pleasure. She continued to take great notice both of him and his little mistress, had them often at the castle, always made Amy a Christmas present, and talks of taking her for her own maid when she grows up.

THE MAGPIES.

"COME along, girls! Helen! Caroline! I say, don't stand jabbering there upon the stairs, but come down this instant, or Dash and I will be off without you."

This elegant speech was shouted from the bottom of the great staircase at Dinely Hall, by young George Dinely, an Etonian of eleven years old, just come home for the holidays, to his two younger sisters, who stood disputing very ardently in French at the top. The cause of contention was, to say the truth, no greater an object than the colour of a work-bag which they were about to make for their mamma: slate lined with pink being the choice of Miss Caroline, whilst Miss Helen preferred drab with a blue lining.

"Don't stand there quarrelling about the colour of your trumpery," added George, "but come along!"

Now George would have scorned to know a syllable of any language except Latin and Greek, but neither of the young ladies being Frenchwomen enough to construe the appellation of the leading article, the words, "drab" and "slate," which came forth in native English pretty frequently, as well as the silk dangling in their hands, had enlightened him as to the matter in dispute.

George was a true schoolboy, rough and kind; affecting, perhaps, more roughness than naturally belonged to him, from a mistaken notion that it made him look bold, and English, and manly. There cannot be a greater mistake, since the boldest man is commonly the mildest, thus realising in every way the expression of Shakespeare, which has been the subject of a somewhat unnecessary commentary, "He's gentle and not fearful." For the rest, our hero loved his sisters, which was very right; and loved to tease them, which was very wrong; and now he and his dog Dash, both wild with spirits and with happiness, were waiting most impatiently to go down to the village on a visit to old Nurse Simmons and her magpie.

Nurse Simmons was a very good and very cross old woman, who, after ruling in the nursery of Dinely Hall for two generations, scolding and spoiling Sir Edward and his brothers, and performing thirty years afterwards the same good office for Master George and his sisters, had lately abdicated her throne on the arrival of a French governess, and was now comfortably settled at a cottage of her own in the village street.

George Dinely and Dash had already that morning visited George's own pony, and his father's brood mares, the garden, the stables, the pheasantry, the green-house, and the farm-yard; had seen a brood of curious bantams, two litters of pigs, and a family of greyhound puppies, and had few friends, old or new, left to visit except Nurse Simmons, her cottage and her magpie, a bird of such accomplishments that his sisters had even made it the subject of a letter to Eton. The magpie might perhaps claim an equal share with his mistress in George's impatience, and Dash, always

eager to get out of doors, seemed nearly as fidgetty as his young master.

Dash was as beautiful a dog as one should see in a summer's day ; one of the large old English spaniels, which are now so rare, with a superb head like those you see in Spanish pictures, and such ears ! they more than met over his pretty spotted nose, and when he lapped his milk dipped into his pan at least two inches. His hair was long and shiny and wavy, not curly, partly of a rich dark liver colour, partly of a silvery white, and beautifully feathered about the legs and thighs. Everybody used to wonder that Dash, who apparently ate so little, should be in such good case ; but the marvel was by no means so great as it seemed, for his being George's peculiar pet and property did not hinder him being the universal favourite of the whole house, from the drawing-room to the kitchen. Not a creature could resist Dash's silent supplications at meal times, when he sat upon his haunches looking amiable, with his large ears brought into their most becoming position, his head a little on one side, and his beautiful eyes fixed on your face, with as near an approach to speech as ever eyes made in the world. From Sir Edward and her ladyship down to the stable-boy and the kitchen-maid, no inhabitant of Dinely Hall could resist Dash ! So that being a dog of most apprehensive sagacity with regard to the hours appropriated to the several refections of the family, he usually contrived, between the dining parlour, the school-room, and the servants' hall, to partake of three breakfasts and as many dinners every day, to say nothing of an occasional snap at luncheon or supper-time. No wonder that Dash was in high condition. His good plight, however, had by

no means impaired his activity. On the contrary, he was extremely lively as well as intelligent, and had a sort of circular motion, a way of flinging himself quite round on his hind feet, something after the fashion in which the French dancers twirl themselves round on one leg, which not only showed unusual agility in a dog of his size, but gave token of the same spirit and animation which sparkled in his bright hazel eye. Anything of eagerness or impatience was sure to excite this motion, and George Dinely gravely assured his sisters, when they at length joined him in the hall, that Dash had flung himself round six and twenty times whilst waiting the conclusion of their quarrel.

Getting out into the lawn and the open air did not tend to diminish Dash's glee or his capers, and the young party walked merrily on; George telling of school pranks and school misfortunes—the having lost or spoilt four hats since Easter seemed rather to belong to the first class of adventures than the second—his sisters listening dutifully and wonderingly; and Dash following his own devices, now turning up a mouse's nest from a water furrow in the park—now springing a covey of young partridges in a cornfield—now plunging his whole hairy person in the brook—and now splashing Miss Helen from head to foot by ungallantly jumping over her whilst crossing a stile, being thereunto prompted by a whistle from his young master, who had, with equal want of gallantry, leapt the stile first himself, and left his sisters to get over as they could; until at last the whole party, having passed the stile, and crossed the bridge, and turned the churchyard corner, found themselves in the shady recesses of the Vicarage lane,

and in full view of the vine-covered cottage of Nurse Simmons.

As they advanced they heard a prodigious chattering and jabbering, and soon got near enough to ascertain that the sound proceeded mainly from one of the parties they were come to visit—Nurse Simmons's magpie. He was perched in the middle of the road, defending a long dirty bare bone of mutton, doubtless his property, on one end of which he stood, whilst the other extremity was occupied by a wild bird of the same species, who, between pecking at the bone, and fighting, and scolding, found full employment. The wild magpie was a beautiful creature, as wild magpies are, of a snowy white and a fine blue black, perfect in shape and plumage, and so superior in appearance to the tame bird, ragged, draggled, and dirty, that they hardly seemed of the same kind. Both were chattering away most furiously: the one in his natural and unintelligible gibberish, the other partly in his native tongue, and partly in that for his skill in which he was so eminent —thus turning his accomplishments to an unexpected account, and larding his own lean speech with divers foreign garnishes, such as, "What's o'clock?" and "How do you do?" and "Very well, I thank you," and "Poor pretty Mag!" and "Mag's a good bird," all delivered in a violent accent, and doubtless understood by the adversary as terms of reproach.

"What can those two magpies be quarrelling about?" said Caroline, as soon as she could speak for laughing; for on the children's approach the birds had abandoned the mutton bone, which had been quietly borne away by Dash, who, in spite of his usual sumptuous fare, had no objection to such a

windfall, and was lying in great state on a mossy bank, discussing and enjoying the stolen morsel.

"What a fury they are in! I wish I knew what they were saying," pursued Caroline.

"They are talking nonsense, doubtless, as people commonly do when they quarrel," quoth George, "and act wisely to clothe it in a foreign tongue; perhaps they may be disputing about colours."

"What an odd noise it is!" continued Caroline, by no means disposed to acknowledge her brother's compliment; "I never heard anything like it."

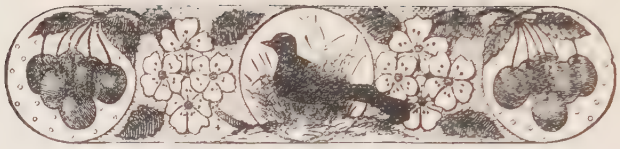
"I have," said George, drily.

"I wonder whether they comprehend each other!" ejaculated Miss Helen, following her sister's example, and taking no notice of the provoking George; "they really do seem to understand."

"As well as other magpies," observed the young gentleman, "why should they not."

"But what strange gibberish!" added poor Helen.

"Gibberish, Miss Helen! Don't you hear that the birds are sputtering magpie French, sprinkled with a little magpie English? I was just going to ask you to explain it to me," replied the unmerciful George. "It is quite a parody on your work-bag squabble," pursued their tormentor; "only that the birds are the wiser, for I see they are parting—the wild one flying away, the tame gentleman hopping towards us. Quite the scene of the work-bag over again," continued George, "only with less noise, and much shortened —an abridged and corrected edition! Really, young ladies, the magpies have the best of it," said the Etonian, and off he stalked into the cottage.



THE ROBINS.

"WHAT have you got in your hat, Edward?" said Arthur Maynard to his cousin Edward Stanhope, as they met one day in our village street, near which they both resided; "what can you have there? a bird's nest?"

"Oh, I hope not!" exclaimed Julia Maynard, who was walking with her brother and a younger sister, "taking birds' nests is cruel."

"Cruel or not, Miss Julia," replied Edward, "a bird's nest it is. Look, Arthur," continued he, displaying a nest full of poor little unfledged creatures, opening four great mouths as wide as they could gape; "look, they are robins."

"Robins! robin redbreasts! the household bird! the friend of man!" cried Arthur; "take a robin's nest! oh, fie, fie."

"The robin redbreast," said little Sophy Maynard, "that when the poor Children in the Wood were starved to death, covered them over with leaves. Did you never hear old Nurse Andrews repeat the old ballad? I can almost say it myself:—

'No burial this pretty pair
Of any man receives,
Till Robin Redbreast painfully
Did cover them with leaves,'"—

shouted Sophy; "you that pretend to be so fond of poetry, to take a robin's nest."

"Poetry!" rejoined Edward, contemptuously, "a penny ballad! an old woman's song! call that poetry!"

"I like to hear it, though," persisted little Sophy; "I had rather hear Nurse Andrews repeat the Children in the Wood than anything; call it what names you like."

"And it was but the other day," said Julia, "that papa made me learn some verses just to the same effect out of Mr. Lamb's Specimens. Did you ever hear them?

> 'Call to the robin redbreast and the wren,
> Since o'er shady groves they hover,
> And with flowers and leaves do cover
> The friendless bodies of unburied men.'

Now I am quite sure that these lines are poetry; and, at all events everybody holds the robin sacred for his social qualities, he is so tame, so confiding, so familiar; no one would ever think of taking his nest, even if birds'-nesting were not the cruelest thing in the world," continued Julia, returning to her first exclamation; "everybody cherishes the robin."

"So do I," replied her incorrigible cousin; "I am so fond of the robin and his note that I mean to bring up all four of these young ones, and tame them, and make friends of them."

"Put back the nest, and I will teach you a better way," said Arthur; "for we mean to tame some robins ourselves this summer."

"Put back the nest indeed!" rejoined Edward. "I must make haste home, and get the butler to give me

a cage, and Fanny to help me to feed them. Put back the nest indeed!" and off ran the naughty taker of birds' nests, vainly pursued by little Sophy's chidings, by Julia's persuasions, by Arthur's remonstrances, and by the united predictions of all three that he would never rear the unfortunate younglings.

Very true were these predictions. One by one, in spite of all the care of Edward and his sister Fanny, who crammed them twenty times a-day with all sorts of food, proper or improper, bread, meat, eggs, herbs, and insects, with every mess, in short, that they had ever heard recommended for any bird; one by one the poor little shivering creatures, shivering although wrapt in lamb's wool and swan's-down, pined, and dwindled, and died; and Fanny, a kind-hearted little girl, fretted and cried; and Edward, not less vexed, but too proud to cry, grumbled at his ill-luck, and declared that he would never trouble himself with birds again as long as he lived. "I wonder how Arthur has succeeded with his!" thought he to himself; "I think he and the girls talked of getting some—but of course they all died. I am sure no people could take more pains than Fanny and I. I'll never trouble myself with birds again."

About two months after this soliloquy, the young Stanhopes received an invitation to dine with their cousins, for it was Sophy's birthday, and the children had a half-holiday; and after dinner they were allowed to eat their cherries and strawberries in their own verandah, a place they were all very fond of. And a very pretty place this verandah was.

Fancy a deep shaded trellis running along one end of the house, covered with vines, passion-flowers, clematis, and jessamine, looking over gay flower-beds,

the children's own flower-beds, to an arbour of honeysuckle, laburnum, and china-roses, which Arthur had made for Julia; clusters of greenhouse plants, their own pet geraniums, arranged round the pillars of the verandah: and the verandah itself furnished with their own tables and chairs, and littered with their toys and their small garden tools; as pretty an out-of-door play-room as heart could desire.

It was a fine sunny afternoon towards the end of June, and the young folks enjoyed the fruits and the flowers, and the sweet scent of the bean blossoms and the new-mown hay in the neighbouring fields, and were as happy as happy could be. At last, after the girls had pointed out their richest geraniums and largest heart's-ease, and they had been properly praised and admired, Arthur said, "I think it is time to show Edward our robins." And at the word little Sophy began strewing bread crumbs at one end of the verandah as fast as her hands could go.

"Bobby! Bobby! pretty Bobby!" cried Sophy; and immediately the prettiest robin that ever was seen came flying out of the arbour towards her; not in a direct line, but zigzag as it were, stopping first at a rose tree, then swinging on the top of a lily, then perching on the branch of a campanula that bent under him—still coming nearer and nearer, and listening, and turning up his pretty head as Sophy continued to cry, "Bobby! Bobby!" and sometimes bowing his body, and jerking his tail in token of pleased acknowledgment, until at last he alighted on the ground, and began picking up the bread crumbs with which it was strewed. Whilst presently two or three young robins with their speckled breasts (for the red feathers do not appear

until they are three or four months old) came fluttering about the verandah, flying in and out quite close to the children, hopping round them, and feeding at their very feet! not shy at all, not even cautious like the old birds, who had seen more of the world, and looked at the strangers with their bright piercing eyes rather mistrustfully, as if they knew that there were such things as little boys who take birds' nests, and little girls who keep birds in cages.

"Bobby! pretty Bobby!" continued Sophy, quite enchanted at the good conduct of her pets, and calling upon her cousins for their tribute of admiration. Fanny willingly expressed her delight; and Edward, looking somewhat foolish, wondered how they became so tame.

"We used to throw down the crumbs from breakfast and dinner in this place all the winter," said Julia; "the poor birds are so glad of them in the hard weather! And one particular robin used to come for them every day, and grew quite familiar; he would even wait here for us, and fly to meet us as soon as that quick eye of his spied a white frock turning the corner. So then we began to talk to him and to feed him regularly."

"I always saved a great bit of my bread for Bobby," interrupted Sophy.

"And he grew as tame as you see; and when he had young ones, he brought them here with him," resumed her sister.

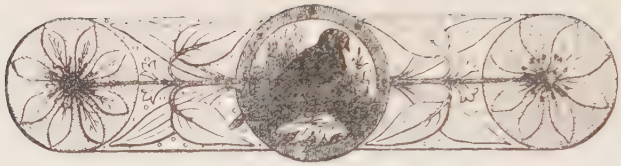
"You should have seen them the first day," said Sophy; "that was the prettiest sight. The little things did not know how to help themselves, so there they stood about, some on the geraniums and some on the rose trees, chirping, and opening their

"Beg, Frisk, Beg!"—*Page* 172.

bills for the old ones to feed them; and the poor old birds flew about from one to the other with bread crumbs, not taking a morsel themselves. You cannot think how much the young ones ate! there was one great greedy fellow perched on my rake, who made his poor papa bring him seven mouthfuls before he was satisfied. And now they are so saucy! see how saucy they are!" continued the little girl, as one of the boldest came close to her, and caught a crumb which she was flinging to him before it reached the ground, "see how saucy! O pretty, pretty Bobbies! I do love them so."

"We all like the poor confiding creatures who pay us the compliment of trusting so entirely in our kindness and good faith, I believe," said Arthur, half laughing at her eagerness; "and after all, Edward," added he, as the two boys, bat in hand, marched off to cricket, "after all, you must confess that our method of taming robins is better than yours, and that one bird who comes to you at liberty, of his own free will, is worth a dozen kidnapped in the nest, luckless wretches, and mewed up in a cage."

Edward confessed that his cousin was right, and never took a bird's nest again.



HARRY LEWINGTON.

"BEG, Frisk, beg!" said little Harry Lewington, as he sat in state on an inverted basket at his grandmother's door, discussing with great satisfaction a huge porringer of bread and milk, whilst his sister Lucy, who had already despatched her breakfast, sat on the ground opposite to him, now twisting the long wreaths of the convolvulus-major into garlands—now throwing them away. "Beg, Frisk, beg!" repeated Harry, holding a bit of bread just out of the dog's reach; and the obedient Frisk squatted himself on his hind legs, and held up his fore paws, in patient supplication, until it pleased Master Harry to bestow upon him the tempting morsel.

The little boy and the little dog were great friends, notwithstanding that Harry, in the wantonness of power, would sometimes tease and tantalise his poor pet more than a good boy ought to have done. Frisk loved him dearly, much better than he did Lucy, although Lucy gave him every day part of her breakfast, without making him beg, and would tie pretty ribbons round his neck, and pat and stroke his rough head for half an hour together. Harry was Frisk's prime favourite; perhaps because the little dog, being himself of a merry disposition, liked

the boy's lively play better than the girl's gentle caresses; perhaps because he recollected that Harry was his earliest patron, and firmest friend, during a time of great trouble: quadrupeds of his species having a knack of remembering past kindness, which it would do the biped, called man, no harm to copy.

Poor Frisk had come as a stray dog to Aberleigh. If he could have told his own story, it would probably have been a very pitiful one, of distress and wanderings, of "hunger and foul weather," of kicks and cuffs, and all "the spurns that patient merit of the unworthy takes." Certain it is that he made his appearance at Mrs. Lewington's door in miserable plight, wet, dirty, and half-starved; that there he encountered Harry, who took an immediate fancy to him, and Mrs. Lewington, who drove him off with a broom; that a violent dispute ensued between the good dame and her grandson, Harry persisting in inviting him in, Mrs. Lewington in frightening him away; that at first it ended in Frisk's being established as a sort of out-door pensioner, subsisting on odds and ends, stray bones, and cold potatoes, surreptitiously obtained for him by his young protector, and sleeping in the identical basket which, turned topsy-turvy, afterwards served Harry for a seat; until at length Mrs. Lewington, who had withstood the incessant importunity of the patron, and the persevering humility of his client, was propitiated by Frisk's own doggish exploit in barking away a set of pilferers, who were making an attack on her great pear-tree, and so frightening the thieves, that they not only scampered off in all haste, but left behind them their implements of thievery, a ladder, two baskets, and a sack: the good dame being thus

actually a gainer by the intended robbery, and so well satisfied with Frisk's conduct, that she not only admitted him into her house, but considered him as one of her most vigilant and valuable inmates, worth all the watchmen that ever sprung a rattle.

The new guard proved to be a four-footed person of singular accomplishments. He could fetch or carry, either by land or by water; would pick up her thimble or cotton, if his old mistress happened to drop them; carry Lucy's little pattens to school in case of a shower; or take Harry's dinner to the same place with unimpeachable honesty. Moreover, he was so strong on his hind legs, walked upright so firmly and gracefully, cut so many capers, and had so good an ear for music, that the more sagacious amongst the neighbours suspected him of having been, at least, the principal performer in a company of dancing dogs, even if he were not the learned dog Munito himself. Frisk and his exploits were the wonder of Aberleigh, where he had now resided a twelvemonth (for August was come round again) with honour and credit to himself, and perfect satisfaction to all parties.

"Beg, Frisk, beg!" said Harry, and gave him, after long waiting, the expected morsel; and Frisk was contented, but Harry was not. The little boy, though a good-humoured fellow in the main, had fits of naughtiness which were apt to last all day, and this promised to be one of his worst. It was a holiday, moreover, when he had nothing to do but to be naughty, and in the afternoon his cousins Susan and William were to come and see him and Lucy, and the pears were to be gathered, and the children to have a treat; and Harry, in his impatience, thought the morning would never be over, and played such pranks

by way of beguiling the time—buffetting Frisk, for instance, burning his own fingers, cutting the curls off his sister's doll's flaxen wig, and finally breaking his grandmother's spectacles—that before his visitors arrived, indeed almost immediately after dinner, he contrived to get sent to bed in disgrace.

Poor Harry! There he lay sprawling, kicking, and roaring, whilst Susan, and William, and Lucy, were happily busy about the fine mellow Windsor pears; William up the tree gathering and shaking, Lucy and Susan catching them in their pinafores, and picking them up from the ground; now piling the rich fruit into the great baskets that the thieves had left behind; and now, happy urchins, eating at discretion of the nicest and ripest; Frisk barking gaily amongst them, as if he were eating Windsor pears too.

Poor Harry! He could hear all their glee and merriment through the open window as he lay in bed; and the storm of passion having subsided into a gentle rain of self-pity, there he lay weeping and disconsolate, a grievous sob bursting forth every now and then as he heard the loud peal of childish laughter, and thought how he should have laughed and how happy he should have been, and wondered whether his grandmother would so far relent as to let him go up to supper, and whether Lucy would be so good-natured as to bring him a pear. "It will be very ill-natured if she does not," thought Harry, and the poor boy's tears burst out anew. All on a sudden he heard a little foot on the stairs, and thought she was coming. Pit-a-pat came the foot, nearer and nearer, and at last a small head peeped, half-afraid, through the half-open door. But it was not Lucy's head; it was Frisk's—poor Frisk, whom Harry had been

teasing all the morning, and who now came into the room, wagging his tail, with a great pear in his mouth, jumped on the bed, and laid it in the little boy's hand.

NOTE.—They who are accustomed to dogs whose sagacity has been improved by domestication and good society, will not be surprised at the foregoing anecdote. Cowper's story of the water-lily is quite a case in point; and a greyhound of my acquaintance, whose favourite playground was a large orchard, used regularly to bring the fallen apples to his mistress, was particularly anxious to go there after a windy night, and seemed to take singular pleasure in the amusement. This might be imitation; but an exploit of my own lamented and beautiful Mayflower can hardly be traced to such an origin. Poor May, in common with most pet dogs, generally cared little for the persons whose duty it was to feed and attend upon her; she seemed to know that it was their place, and received their services with calm and aristocratic civility, reserving all demonstration of affection for her friends of the parlour. One of her attendants, however, a lively, good-humoured boy called Tom, she honoured with a considerable share of her attention, liked his company, and, to the astonishment of the whole household, certainly liked him, a partiality which Tom returned with interest, combing and caressing her whenever opportunity offered. Master Tom was a celebrated player at marbles, and May was accustomed to stand at his side watching or seeming to watch the game. One afternoon she jumped over the half-hatch into the stable, evidently in search of her friend Tom—no Tom was there; raced round the garden—still in vain; peeped into the kitchen—Tom was as much to seek as ever: the maids, who saw that she had something in her mouth, and were amused by her earnest searching air, tried to detain her or to decoy her into the parlour, but without the slightest success. On she went from chase-house to wood-house, from wood-house to coal-house, from coal-house to cart-house, until she caught a well-known sound from the knife-board, and, opening the door in the way, darted on the astonished Tom, and deposited in his hand a marble, which, as we afterwards found, she had picked up in the road, following up her present by a series of capers and gambols the most joyous and triumphant that can be imagined

PRIDE SHALL HAVE A FALL.

"SO you Aberleigh boys are about to play Sandleford," said George Leslie to Horace Lucas; "have you a good eleven?"

"Our players are pretty fair, I believe," replied Horace, "but the number is short. Both sides have agreed to take a mate or two from other parishes, and I rode over to ask your cousin Charles and yourself to join our Aberleigh party."

"Faith! you are in luck, my good friend," cried George Leslie; "you may look upon the game as won. Charles, to be sure, is no great hand; can't bowl; hits up; and a bad field—a slow awkward field. But I—Did you never see me play? And I am so improved this season! I ought to be improved, for I have seen such play, and such players! I am just returned from my aunt's, who lives within a mile of Bramshill—Sir John's, you know—and there were all the great men of the day, all the Lord's men: Mr. Ward and Mr. Budd—I'm thought to stand at my wicket very much like Mr. Budd; Saunders, who is reckoned, take him all in all, the best player in England; Saunders; and Broadbridge, the Sussex bowler—I don't patronise their system, though, I stick to the

old steady, scientific game; Lord Frederick and Mr. Knight—he's a fine figure of a man is Mr. Knight, the finest figure of any of them, and very great in the field; old Howard, the bowler—he's my model; and, in short, almost every celebrated cricketer in England. I know that you Westminsters think that nobody can do anything so well as yourselves; but as far as cricket goes—ask Charles, he'll tell you that you are in luck to have me." And off the young gentleman strutted to pay his compliments to some ladies who were talking to his mother on the other side of the lawn; for this conversation took place on a fine day in July, under the heavy shadow of some tall elms, in Mrs. Leslie's beautiful grounds.

George's speech had been delivered in a high, solemn, vaunting tone, as grave as Don Quixote; but of the two who remained, Horace, a quick, arch, lively lad, laughed outright, and Charles, a mild, fair, delicate boy, could not help smiling.

"He gives himself a comfortable character, however," said Horace, "rather too good to be true; whilst of you he speaks modestly enough. Are you so bad, Charles? And is he such a paragon of cricketers? Does he bat like Mr. Budd, and field like Mr. Knight, and bowl like Howard?"

"Why, not exactly," was the reply; "but there's more truth than you think for. He's a good but uncertain player; and I am a bad one, a very bad one; shy, and timid, and awkward; always feeling when the game is over that I could have done better; just as I have felt when a clever man, your father, for instance, has had the goodness to speak to me, how much better I ought to have talked. Somehow the power never comes at the right time

at either game; so that I may say, as some people say of cucumbers, that I like cricket, but that cricket does not like me."

"Good or bad, my dear fellow, I'll take you," said Horace, "nervousness and all. It's a pity that you two cousins could not make over one to another some parcel of your several qualities; you would be much the happier for a dash of George's self-conceit, and he could spare enough to set up a whole regiment of dandies; whilst he would be all the better for your superfluous modesty. However, I'll take you both, right thankfully." And the arrangements were entered into forthwith. They were to meet on the ground on the ensuing morning to play the match; different engagements preventing the Leslies from practising with the Aberleigh side that evening, as Horace had wished and intended; for our friend Horace, ardent and keen in everything, whether of sport or study, had set his heart on winning this match, and was very desirous of trying the powers of his new allies. Fifty times during the evening did he count over his own good players, and the good players of the other side, and gravely conclude, "It will all depend on the Leslies. How I wish to-morrow were come!" He said this so often that even his sister Emily, although the most indulgent person in the world, and very fond of her brother, grew so tired of hearing him that she could not help saying, "I wish to-morrow were come too!"

And at last, as generally happens, whether we wish for it or not, to-morrow did come, as brilliant a to-morrow as ever was anticipated, even by a schoolboy in the holidays. The sun rose without a

cloud; I speak from the best authority, "for scorning the scorner sleep," Horace was up before him: and the ball being twenty times weighed, and the bats fifty times examined, he repaired, by half-past nine, to Sandleford Common, where the match was to be played, and the wickets pitched precisely at ten o'clock.

All parties were sufficiently punctual; and when the whole set had assembled, Horace found that, in spite of his calculations, a mistake had arisen in the amount of his forces; that reckoning himself, there were ten Aberleigh boys on the ground, besides the two foreign allies, proceeding, perhaps, from his over anxiety to collect recruits, whilst the Sandleford captain, on the contrary, had neglected to secure another mate as agreed on, and could only muster the original ten of his own parish, himself included.

In this dilemma the umpires immediately proposed to divide the auxiliaries, a suggestion to which George assented with his usual sang froid and Charles with his invariable good-humour.

"You had better toss up for me," said the former. "For the choice," was Horace's civil amendment, and toss they did. "Heads!" cried he of Sandleford, and heads it was; and partly caught by the young gentleman's happy knack of puffing himself, partly by the knowing manner in which he was handling his bat, George was instantly claimed by the winner, and the game began.

Sandleford went in, and it was desired that the stranger and the best of the home party should take the precedence. But our great player coquetted. "It might put their side out of spirits if, by any

accident, he were out early in the game; he had seen a match lost by Mr. Budd or Saunders having their wickets knocked down sooner than was expected. He would wait." Accordingly, it was not till the first four had gone down with only twenty notches gained that he at last went in, "to retrieve," as he said, "the fortune of the day."

Nothing could be more imposing than his appearance. There he stood at the wicket, striking his bat against the ground with impatience, pawing the earth, as it were, like a race-horse at the starting-post, or a greyhound in the slips, and friends and foes admired and wondered. Even Horace Lucas felt the effect of the fine attitude and the brilliant animation, and delivered his ball less steadily than usual, anticipating that his opponent would get at least three runs. His fears were soon quieted. "By some accident" (to use the young gentleman's own phrase) Mr. George hit up; and that exceedingly bad field, his cousin Charles, caught him out without a notch.

This misadventure sadly disconcerted Sandleford as well as the unfortunate champion, and put Aberleigh in high spirits. Horace bowled better than ever; the fielding was excellent; and the whole eleven were out for forty-seven notches—a wretched innings.

Aberleigh then went in; Horace, and at Horace's request, his ally Charles: George being one of the bowlers. But poor George (to borrow once more his own words) was "out of luck, thoroughly out of luck," for in spite of all his efforts the two mates got fifty-six before they parted, and the whole score was a hundred and nine.

Eighty-two ahead in the first innings! Small

hopes for Sandleford, even though George went in immediately, "determined," as he said, "to conquer fortune." Small hopes for Sandleford!

"Come, Charles," said Horace Lucas, "let us see whether your bowling may not be as good as your batting. Just give your cousin one ball." And at the very first ball the stumps rattled, and the discomfited cricketer slunk away, amidst the crowing of his antagonists and the reproaches of his mates, so crestfallen, that even Horace was touched by his disconsolate countenance and humbled air. His tender-hearted cousin felt a still deeper sympathy, and almost lamented his own success.

"It is all luck, sir," said he, in answer to a compliment from General Lucas, who stood talking to him after the match had been triumphantly won; "it is all luck! Poor George is a far better player than I am; he was so yesterday, and will be so to-morrow. This is merely the fortune of a day, a trifle not worth a word or a thought!"

"The object is trifling, I grant you, my good young friend," said the General, "and luck may have had some share in the victory; but I am much mistaken if your success and your cousin's mortification be not of essential benefit to both. It is one of the most salutary parts of the world's discipline, that modesty should triumph and that Pride should have a Fall."

THE TWO DOLLS.

A LUCKY day it was for little Fanny Elvington when her good aunt Delmont consented to receive her into her family, and sent for her from a fine old place, six miles from hence, Burdon Park, where she had been living with her maternal grandfather, to her own comfortable house in Brunswick Square. Poor Fanny had no natural home, her father, Genera Elvington, being in India with his lady; and a worse residence than the Park could hardly be devised for a little girl, since Lady Burton was dead, Sir Richard too sickly to be troubled with children, and the care of his granddaughter left entirely to a vulgar old nurse and a superfine housekeeper. A lucky day for Fanny was that in which she exchanged their misrule for the wise and gentle government of her good aunt Delmont.

Fanny Elvington was a nice little girl, who had a great many good qualities, and, like other little girls, a few faults, which had grown up like weeds under the neglect and mismanagement of the people at the Park, and threatened to require both time and pains to eradicate. For instance, she had a great many foolish antipathies and troublesome fears, some caught from the affectation

of the housekeeper, some from the ignorance of the nurse: she shrieked at the sight of a mouse, squalled at a frog, was well nigh ready to faint at an earwig, and quite as much afraid of a spider as if she had been a fly; she ran away from a quiet ox as if he had been a mad bull, and had such a horror of chimney-sweepers that she shrank her head under the bedclothes whenever she heard the deep cry of "Sweep! sweep!" forerunning the old clothesman and the milkman on a frosty morning, and could hardly be persuaded to look at them, poor creatures, dressed in their tawdry tinsel, and dancing round Jack of the Green on May-day. But her favourite fear, her pet aversion, was a negro; especially a little black footboy who lived next door, and whom she never saw without shrinking, and shuddering, and turning pale.

It was a most unlucky aversion for Fanny, and gave her and her aunt more trouble than all her other mislikings put together, inasmuch as Pompey came oftener in view than mouse or frog, spider or earwig, ox or chimney-sweep. How it happened nobody could tell, but Pompey was always in Fanny Elvington's way. She saw him twice as often as any one else in the house. If she went to the window he was sure to be standing on the steps: if she walked in the square garden she met him crossing the pavement: she could not water her geraniums in the little court behind the house but she heard his merry voice singing in broken English as he cleaned the knives and shoes on the other side of the wall; nay, she could not even hang out her canary-bird's cage at the back door but

he was sure to be feeding his parrot at theirs. Go where she would, Pompey's shining black face and broad white teeth followed her: he haunted her very dreams; and the oftener she saw him, whether sleeping or waking, the more her unreasonable antipathy grew upon her. Her cousins laughed at her without effect, and her aunt's serious remonstrances were equally useless.

The person who, next to Fanny herself, suffered the most from this foolish and wicked prejudice, was poor Pompey, whose intelligence, activity, and good-humour had made him a constant favourite in his master's house, and who had sufficient sensibility to feel deeply the horror and disgust which he had inspired in his young neighbour. At first he tried to propitiate her by bringing groundsel and chickweed for her canary-bird, running to meet her with an umbrella when she happened to be caught in the rain, and other small attentions, which were repelled with absolute loathing.

"Me same flesh and blood with you, missy, though skin be black," cried poor Pompey one day, when pushed to extremity by Fanny's disdain, "same flesh and blood, missy!" a fact which the young lady denied with more than usual indignation; she looked at her own white skin, and she thought of his black one; and all the reasoning of her aunt failed to convince her, that where the outside was so different, the inside could by possibility be alike. At last Mrs. Delmont was fain to leave the matter to the great curer of all prejudices, called Time, who in this case seemed even slower in his operations than usual.

In the meanwhile, Fanny's birthday approached,

and as it was within a few days of that of her cousin, Emma Delmont, it was agreed to celebrate the two festivals together. Double feasting! double holiday! double presents! never was a gayer anniversary. Mrs. Delmont's own gifts had been reserved to the conclusion of the jollity, and after the fruit was put on the tables, two huge dolls, almost as big as real babies, were introduced to the little company. They excited and deserved universal admiration. The first was a young lady of the most delicate construction and the most elaborate ornament; a doll of the highest fashion, with sleeves like a bishop, a waist like a wasp, a magnificent bustle, and petticoats so full and so puffed out round the bottom, that the question of hoop or no hoop was stoutly debated between two of the elder girls. Her cheeks were very red, and her neck very white, and her ringlets in the newest possible taste. In short, she was so completely *à la mode* that a Parisian milliner might have sent her as a pattern to her fellow tradeswoman in London, or the London milliner might have returned the compliment to her sister artist over the water. Her glories, however, were fated to be eclipsed. The moment that the second doll made its appearance, the lady of fashion was looked at no longer.

The second doll was a young gentleman, habited in the striped and braided costume which is the ordinary transition dress of boys between leaving off petticoats and assuming the doublet and hose. It was so exactly like Willy Delmont's own attire, that the astonished boy looked at himself, to be sure that the doll had not stolen the clothes off his back. The apparel, however, was not the charm that

fixed the attention of the young people; the attraction was the complexion, which was of as deep and shining a black, as perfect an imitation of a negro, in tint and feature, as female ingenuity could accomplish. The face, neck, arms, and legs were all covered with black silk; and much skill was shown in shaping and sewing on the broad flat nose, large ears, and pouting lips, whilst the great white teeth and bright round eyes relieved the monotony of the colour. The wig was of black worsted, knitted, and then unravelled, as natural as if it had actually grown on the head. Perhaps the novelty (for none of the party had seen a black doll before) might increase the effect, but they all declared that they had never seen so accurate an imitation, so perfect an illusion. Even Fanny, who at first sight had almost taken the doll for her old enemy Pompey in little, and had shrunk back accordingly, began at last to catch some of the curiosity (for curiosity is a catching passion) that characterised her companions. She drew near—she gazed—at last she even touched the doll, and listened with some interest to Mrs. Delmont's detail of the trouble she found in constructing the young lady and gentlemen.

"What are they made of, aunt?"

"Rags, my dear!" was the reply: "nothing but rags," continued Mrs. Delmont, unripping a little of the black gentleman's foot and the white lady's arm, and showing the linen of which they were composed; —"both alike, Fanny," pursued her good aunt, "both the same colour underneath the skin, and both the work of the same hand—like Pompey and you," added she, more solemnly; "and now choose which doll you will."

And Fanny, blushing and hesitating, chose the black one: and the next day her aunt had the pleasure to see her show it to Pompey over the wall, to his infinite delight; and in a very few days Mrs. Delmont had the still greater pleasure to find that Fanny Elvington had not only overcome and acknowledged her prejudice, but had given Pompey a new half-crown, and had accepted groundsel for her canary-bird from the poor negro boy.

NOTE.—About a month after sitting to me for his portrait the young black gentleman whom I have endeavoured to describe (I do not mean Pompey, but the doll) set out upon his travels. He had been constructed in this little Berkshire of ours for some children in the great county of York, and a friend of mine, travelling northward, had the goodness to offer him a place in her carriage for the journey. My friend was a married woman, accompanied by her husband and another lady, and finding the doll cumbersome to pack, wrapped it in a large shawl, and carried it in her lap baby fashion. At the first inn where they stopped to dine she handed it carelessly out of the carriage before alighting, and was much amused to see it received with the grave officious tenderness usually shown to a real infant by the nicely dressed hostess, whose consternation, when, still taking it for a living child, she caught a glimpse of the complexion, is said to have been irresistibly ludicrous. Of course my friend did not undeceive her. Indeed, I believe she humoured the mistake wherever it occurred all along the north road, to the unspeakable astonishment and mystification of chamber-maids and waiters.

THE FOSTER-MOTHER.

"PRAY how do you like your new schoolfellow, Sir Arthur Vere?" said Mr. Stanley to his young son Charles, as they were sauntering rather than walking in the noble park which surrounds his fine old seat of Stanley Manor, on a bright April morning; "his grandmother speaks of him as a lad of high promise."

"Of high promise, does she, sir? Whew!" quoth Master Charles, whistling to a large spaniel, and beating the sedges round a fine piece of water, by the edge of which they stood. "A lad of promise! Whew! Heigh, Dash! heigh! One may be sure there are teal or wild ducks here by Dash's action. Heigh, Dash! Heigh!" continued Master Stanley. "And so his grandmamma speaks of Vere as a lad of promise! Whew, Dash! There's a fine fellow!"

Now Master Charles Stanley was a boy still under eleven; but being clever, bold, and spirited, an old denizen of a public school, and encouraged to talk freely at home, he spoke with a decision and freedom not very usual at his age, thus exhibiting to his excellent father, and by exhibiting, enabling him to correct the rash judgments of

inexperience, and the petulant decisions of a presumptuous though generous character. In the present instance, Mr. Stanley was a good deal amused by the manner in which his son had contrived to intimate his dissent from the opinion of the good old Lady Vere, and when Charles repeated, "A lad of high promise, indeed! Whew, Dash! Whew!" he replied at once to his insinuation, "And why not a boy of promise, Charles?"

"Because, sir, he's so much more like a girl. You never saw such a mincing, blushing, delicate personage as it is in all your life; afraid of getting wet in the feet lest he should catch cold, or of going without his hat lest he should spoil his complexion. He wraps half-a-dozen silk handkerchiefs about his neck because he is subject to sore throats; wears kid gloves at cricket for fear his hands should chap; and wraps up his feet in woollen socks because he had once a chilblain. A promising boy, indeed! Why, sir, his grandmother herself could not be a greater coddle in her own venerable person, than this precious sprig of the baronetage, Sir Francis Vere."

Mr. Stanley smiled in spite of himself. "*You'll* come to kid gloves some time or other, Master Charles; for as rough and red as those paws of yours are now, one may trust to the instinct of eighteen for that foppery. But eleven *is* rather early."

"Besides, sir," continued Charles, "he sports a dressing-box as large as my trunk, full of almond paste, and violet soap, and *eau de Cologne*, and oil for the hair, and all manner of essences, so that one may smell him half-a-mile off; and his cambric handkerchief was tossed out of the school only last

week by Dr. K., because it half poisoned him by stinking of otto of roses. I hope I shall never come to that, sir, even if I do turn out a coxcomb at eighteen."

"There is no telling, Charles," replied his father. "I think you a very promising subject for any folly that may happen at that time to be the fashion. But this poor boy! What a life he must lead amongst you! And how entirely he owes his effeminacy to the accident of his being brought up amongst females!"

"I think not, sir; it is the nature of the creature. If you were to see him you would say so. All the grandmothers in the world would never make a manly lad such a milksop." And Charles looked at himself as he stood struttingly flourishing a switch in one hand, and carressing Dash—who, dripping with mud from the bank, was splashing him most manfully from top to toe—with the other, he looked as if he would fain have said, "All the grandmothers in the world would never have made a milksop of me."

Apparently Mr. Stanley read his son's thoughts. "Ah, Charles! you know little of the effect of education, of habit, of constant association. You yourself, if exposed to similar circumstances, would have been just as likely to turn out a missy young gentleman as this poor child, Sir Arthur Vere—his very title will make against him. But talking of the power of association, come and sit down on this bank, and let Dash return to his dear sport of beating for wild fowl, and be quiet, if you can, for five minutes, whilst I tell you a story."

Now Master Charles did not very thoroughly relish

this invitation. It seemed to him hardly manly to sit down for the purpose of listening to a story which, he suspected, was to be told to him for the sake of the moral; he obeyed, nevertheless, flumping himself down in the midst of a tuft of cowslips, whilst Dash, with equal comprehension and far more alacrity, returned to his search for the wild duck's nest, the existence of which had become clear to his sagacity amongst the sedges and shallows on the water's edge.

"Nay, it is not much of a story either," said Mr. Stanley, when both were comfortably established on their soft and fragrant seat. "Not much that deserves the name of a story, though a curious fact in natural history. Do you remember admiring Dr. Lyndsay's pretty little spaniel yesterday, and wondering at his name?" *

"Romulus? Yes, sir; I do not know which I admired most—the venerable master, with his fine upright person and keen bright eye, his white bushy wig and three-cornered hat, and clerical coat, walking so alertly and speaking so kindly, and yet with something stately about him too, or the pretty little deli-

* Odd names in dogs are by no means uncommon. I saw a lady's lap-dog yesterday who was called Spes, and the little creature being a gentleman, there was no translating the name and calling it by the more euphonious appellation of Hope—for Hope is feminine, and feminine must be, as witness Collins's ode, Lawrence's picture, Miss Sedgwick's novel of *Hope Leslie*, and the thousand and one seals where she flourishes leaning elegantly against her anchor. Of course we challenged his fair and charming mistress (for most fair and most charming she is) as to the donor of her pretty pet, since to give the name of Hope to the approved emblem of Fidelity did look rather lover-like. But the little creature had been a present from her brother, and so called in compliance with his desire—a mere classical whim, containing no allusion whatever.

cate creature, so white and shining, that followed him—rather too much like a lady's pet to be sure—but the little dog and the master matched each other well; both seemed courtly and dignified, a sort of people whose company did one honour."

"The master's company would do honour to any court in Europe, Charles. You are right there. He is one of the most learned and eminent persons in England, and as remarkable for his high qualities as for his vast attainments. But it is with Romulus that we have to do at present. Romulus's mother belonged to your kind friend Colonel Bruce, the gay, gallant, handsome sportsman, whose manliness and gentlemanliness you admire so much. She was a beautiful little spaniel, of the Marlborough breed, excellent as a sporting dog, and a great pet with her master. She had just been confined with Romulus and another pup, and was very literally in the straw; when one fine morning in September Colonel Bruce sallied forth with his gun and his pointers, partridge shooting, little suspecting that his poor pet, whose attention had unluckily been caught by the gun and the leathern gaiters, had left her puppies to follow him to the field. The pointers were ranging the stubble, when Colonel Bruce heard a rustling in the hedge-row close by; he saw nothing, but taking for granted that it was a hare, fired, and killed his little favourite dead upon the spot."

"Oh, papa! Poor Colonel Bruce! What a sad accident! How shocked he must have been!"

"Shocked enough, Charles. Even now he says he can scarcely bear to think of it. The poor little creature, when he discovered her amongst the long grass and reeds, uttering one faint moan, looked up

in his face fondly and piteously, tried to lick his hand, then gave one shiver, stretched out her delicate feet and died. She, however, was dead. But the puppies! What was to become of them? Only three days old, and smaller than rats!"

"What did become of them, father?"

"Why, luckily, Mrs. Bruce had a favourite cat, whose kittens had just been taken from her. The pups were put to pussy, who took to them as if they had been her own offspring, and brought them up with all imaginable care and success."

"Well, sir, now I find the reason of the name.—Well?"

"Romulus you have seen. He is rather smaller, perhaps, than he might have been if nursed by his own mother, but that, in a Marlborough spaniel, is a merit; and Remus (for so, of course, the brother twin was called) is smaller still. Their foster-mother did them all possible justice; and was fonder of them, and nourished them longer than she had ever been known to do by her own kittens. But the extraordinary part of the story is, that with the cat's milk these little doglings imbibed also a cat's habits; would sit and wash their faces with their paws, were excellent mousers, and would watch a rat-hole for an hour.'

"Oh, papa!'

"Fact, I assure you, Charles. The celebrated cat, who was turned into a lady at the prayer of her master, never caught a mouse in better style than Romulus, who, moreover, would no more wet his feet than his purring foster-mother, or Sir Arthur Vere."

"Oh, father!"

"It's the simple truth, I assure you, Charles; and

proceeds, in both instances, from the same cause—example and education; and the self-same story, which throws some light on the origin of that poor boy's effeminacy, may also afford good hope of his reformation; for whilst Romulus, under the tender care of Dr. Lyndsay, which (no offence to him) may in this instance be compared to the tutelage of Lady Vere, continues to pursue and practise all his cattish propensities and habits, Remus, turned into Colonel Bruce's kennel, which (no offence to that repository of doggish learning), may not be unaptly likened to the riotous seminary, yclept a public school, has recovered all his canine hardihood and accomplishments, is famous in covert and hedgerow, as good a water dog as Dash himself, and as little likely to notice a mouse, or wash his face with his paws, as that sagacious quadruped. And now, Charles, may we not have hope of Sir Arthur?"

And Charles assented—and so it proved. Before two years had elapsed, young Vere, stimulated by ridicule, had flung aside his kid gloves, his woollen socks, his perfumery, and his foppery, had overcome his horror of wet feet and chapped hands, and had become the best rower, and the second best cricketer of his form.

N.B.—The caninital part of my little story is literally true. Romulus is still living, and the property of no less a person than the venerable P——, of M—— College, the learned and excellent Dr. R——.

YOUNG MASTER BEN.

IT was about seven o'clock one evening in the Christmas week that I was sitting alone in our little parlour, with my feet on the fender, my dog Dash reclining against my knee (I beg Dash's pardon for having reckoned him as nobody), a glowing fire before me, and an apple roasting on the hob—doing nothing, unless occasionally turning the apple or patting Dash's beautiful head may be accounted doings—and entirely immersed in that perfection of lazy comfort—that piece of dreamy delight yclept a reverie.

There was, too, that additional zest to the enjoyment of indoor warmth and comfort which is derived from the effect of strong contrast without. The weather was what is usually and most expressively termed—bitter. Snow lay deep on the ground, and the dark cloudy sky gave token that the first interval of calm would produce another fall. At the moment of which I speak the wind was too high even for a snowstorm; the fierce north-east howled amain, and the icy bushes in the hedge-rows rattled and crackled in the tempest, whilst the large boughs of the trees creaked like the masts of a ship at sea. It is strange that these noises, betokening so much misery to the poor wretches doomed to wander abroad, should add

to the sense of snugness and security at home—but so it is! The selfishness, however unamiable, is too general to be ashamed of, or even to lament over; and, perhaps, a silent thankfulness for one's own superior comforts may tend to throw into the feeling that portion of good which will generally be found in the inward meditations of every human being not absolutely wicked; for the thoughts of an hour, as well as the actions of a life, are of mingled yarn; none, I fear, all virtuous—few, I trust, utterly wicked.

My enjoyment of that blessed state, the "far' niente," was, however, much too dreamy and vague to permit me to analyse my own sensations. And yet my reverie was not wholly pleasurable either. We lived in the midst of the disturbed districts; my father was at B., attending his duty (a very painful one on this occasion) as chairman of the bench; and though I had every reason to believe that the evil spirit was subsiding, and that he was at that instant sitting as quietly and as snugly as myself, with his friend the high sheriff and his brother magistrates, in a warm, comfortable, elegant room at the Crown Inn (for happen what may, justices must dine!), or at the worst, seated by a large fire taking examinations in the council chamber at B., still no one who lived within reach of the armed peasantry, or of the exaggerated and still more frightful rumours that preceded their approach, or who had witnessed, as I had done, the terrific blaze of the almost nightly conflagrations, could get rid of the vague idea of danger which might arrive at any moment, especially to one notoriously and actively engaged in putting down the mischief. Our parish had remained, it is true, happily free from the contagion; still it raged all around, east,

west, north, and south; we were on a well-frequented highway, almost at the very point where four roads met, and the mobs travelled so far and so fast, that there was no telling at what hour or from what point of the compass our quiet village might be invaded.

Just as thoughts like these were beginning to traverse the blissful thoughtfulness of my reverie, a noise of shouting voices and rushing feet from the end of the street struck my ear. Dash started up instantly, and I was preparing to ring the bell and to be frightened, when a sound, well known to each of us, pacified us both. Dash, who is a superb old English spaniel, gave his magnificent ears a mighty shake; and making his accustomed three turns on the hearth-rug, lay down before the fire; and I, with a strangely modified feeling, alarm subsiding into amazed curiosity, proceeded to the door to examine into the cause of the uproar.

The sound which produced this consolatory effect was the well-known and peculiar whistle of Master Ben Emery—a sound which, while it gave token of every variety of boyish mischief, was yet a most comfortable assurance against anything worse.

Young Master Ben was one of those truly English personages, who, even in boyhood, show token of the character that is to be—a humourist in embryo, an oddity, a wag. His father was a better sort of labourer, a kind of bailiff or upper man in the service of a neighbouring farmer, and had brought up a large family honestly and creditably. All of these were now happily out of the way—some at service, some in business, some married, and some dead—with the exception of Benjamin, the youngest born, his mother's darling and plague. Ben was not—as

a mother's darling often is—a beauty. His carroty locks forbade any claim to that title, though he had the lively blue eye and pleasant smile which so often accompany that complexion, and cause a general resemblance, a kind of family likeness, between red-haired people. In person he was a thin, stunted, dwarfish boy of fourteen, small and light enough to pass for ten, who made use of his actual age to evade a longer attendance at the charity school, the master of which, a dull personage, no way fit to cope with Ben's biting jests, acquiescing in the young gentleman's own account of his scholarship purely to get rid of him; whilst his smallness of size and look of youth and debility he turned to account in another way, pleading his deficiency in bulk and stature, and general weakness and delicacy, as a reason for not going to work at the farm with his father, whose master had consented to employ him to drive the team. He weakly! Why, in play or in mischief he was a pocket Hercules! has beaten big Bob the blacksmith at quoits; and thrown Titus Penwyn, the Cornish boy, in wrestling. Delicate! why, if the sun or the world would but have stood still for the time, there is no doubt but he could have played at cricket for eight-and-forty hours running, without requiring more pause than the usual fifteen minutes between the innings. No exercise that bore the name of sport was too much for him; sheer labour was another matter.

Not only did he plead weakness and delicacy to escape the promotion of plough-boy at farmer Brookes's, but when hired by his father to keep Master Simmons's sheep—an employment that seemed made for him, inasmuch as there was for

ten hours in the day nothing to do but to lie on a bank and practise a certain pastoral flageolet with which he used to go too-tooing through the village —he contrived to get dismissed in three days for incapacity and contumacy; and even when proffered by his mother to look after her crony dame Welles's Welsh cow, an animal famous for getting out of bounds, not for the lucre of gain, but simply, as she expressed it, to keep both the creatures out of mischief, his services were rejected by the prudent dame with the observation, that obstropulous and wild as her beast might be, Ben was incomparably the most unmanageable of the two—a proof of bad reputation which so enraged his father, that he only escaped a sound flogging by climbing up a tree like a squirrel, and sleeping all night in the coppice amidst the fern and the bushes.

It was the very day after this misadventure that Ben contrived to attach himself to our little establishment as a sort of help to our boy John. How he managed nobody can tell, for all the house knew him and his character, and everybody in it held him for the very incarnation of mischief; but here he is, in prime favour with every one, not regularly paid and hired to be sure, but receiving sufficient and comfortable wages in the shape of pretty constant dinners and suppers, frequent largesses of sixpences and shillings, and occasional doles of wearing apparel, I question whether he be not more expensive to our small household than that model of a boy John himself. Having said this, it is but right to add that he is nearly as useful in his own wild way; will do anything on earth that he thinks can serve or please, especially if he be not ordered to do it (for

he has a Sir-John-Falstaff-like aversion to compulsion); makes himself in one way or other agreeable to the whole family—always excepting a certain under-maid called Betsy, against whom he has a spite; and although renowned all over the parish for story-telling, a peccadillo which I really believe he cannot help, never takes any of us in (for we know him so well that we never dream of believing him), unless now and then when he happens to speak the truth, which has the same effect in deceiving his hearers as falsehood from other people.

We keep Ben because we like him. Why he came to us, heaven knows! Perhaps for the same reason; perhaps to avoid the flogging which roosting in the coppice had delayed, but not averted; perhaps attracted by a clever jay of mine, now, alas! no more—a bird of great accomplishment, and almost as saucy as himself; perhaps for the chance of handling a certain gun which he had seen John cleaning, an implement of noise and mischief that just suits his fancy, and which he brandishes of a night about the garden, pretending to hear thieves; perhaps to ride a fine young horse of ours, which nobody else can ride; for he is an excellent horseman, and with his quick wit and light weight, seems born for a jockey; perhaps, and this is the likeliest cause of all, to have opportunity of playing tricks on poor Betsy, whom neither I nor my maid Anne, and I believe she tries all in her power, can protect from his elvish machinations. But that very day had he spoilt my dinner (most unintentionally as far as his design went) by throwing a snow-ball at her as she stood by the kitchen fire, which, from her suddenly starting aside to avoid the missile, alighted on the back of a fowl

in the act of being roasted, which was thereby rendered totally uneatable. This feat had, of course, brought him into great disgrace in the lower regions; and since half-past five, when the misadventure took place, nothing had been seen or heard of the young gentleman till now that his repeated and well-known whistle gave token of his vicinity.

Immediately after Ben's whistle, another sound was heard in the *melée* rising amidst the tramp of feet bounding along the frosty path from which the snow had been swept, the shouts and cries of children escaping and pursued, and the distant tinkling of a bell—another well-known sound, the loud, gruff, angry voice of Master Clarke, the parish beadle.

This worthy functionary was a person who, an enemy to mischievous boys by virtue of his office, had contrived to render his post and his person peculiarly obnoxious to that small rabble of the village, of whom Ben might be considered the ring-leader, by a sour, stern severity of aspect and character, an unrelenting aversion to frolic or pastime of any sort, and an alacrity in pursuing and punishing the unhappy culprits, which came in strong contrast with his usual stolid slowness of act and word. Of course, Master Clarke could not fail to be unpopular: and the mingled noises of his voice and of the bell reminded me that that very morning he had been to our house to inform his Worship that every night, as soon as he sat down to supper, his shop-bell had been rung and rung and rung, not by profitable customers, but by some invisible enemies, boys of course, whom he was determined to catch, if catch he could, and to punish with all the severity of his rod of office. His Worship, an indulgent and kindly personage, heard

his complaints, and smiled and shook his head, and even threw away upon him a little of that unprofitable commodity called good advice!—"Boys will be boys, Master Clarke," said he; "you were one once, and so was I. Better leave the bell unanswered for a night or two; take no notice, and depend on it they'll soon tire of their frolic."

This recollection, which came across me as I passed from the door of the parlour to the door of the hall, completely enlightened me as to the cause of the uproar; and I was prepared to see, by the pale cold dim snow-light, Master Clarke, with a screaming, struggling urchin in either hand (little Dick Wilson, poor fellow! who had but just donned the doublet and hose, and Sam Sewell, who is still in petticoats) in full chase of the larger fry who were flying before his fury, whilst Master Ben was lying *perdu* in a corner of our court, under shadow of the wall which he had contrived to leap or to scramble over. The sound of the distant ringing seemed to augment with every stride that Master Clarke took, who, half maddened with that noise and with a sudden whistle which Ben again sent forth from his hiding-place under the wall, suddenly abandoned his pursuit, and was making for our gate, when all at once the man—one of the largest proportions, colossal, gigantic!—seemed pulled back with a mighty jerk by some invisible cause, and was laid prostrate and sprawling in the snowy kennel. Ben jumped on the wall, the better to survey and laugh at him, as Puck might have done at Bottom, and the rest of the crew dancing with shouts of triumph round their fallen enemy, like the make-believe fairies round Falstaff in the guise of Herne

the Hunter. The cause of this downfall was soon discovered to be a strong cord tied at one end to Master Clarke's coat, at the other to the bell at his shop door—but how fastened, or by whom, this deponent saith not. Betsy, indeed, avers that the cord much resembles one which she herself missed that very evening from John and Ben's bedstead; and the beadle hath his own suspicions; but as no certain proof could be obtained, Master Ben hath escaped Scot-free.

IV.

CONDITION OF OUR VILLAGE.

ANOTHER GLANCE.

IT is now many months since our village first sat for its picture, and I cannot say farewell to my courteous readers without giving them a little intelligence of our goings on—a sort of parting glance at us and our condition. In outward appearance it hath, I suppose, undergone less alteration than any place of its inches in the kingdom. There it stands, the same long straggling street of pretty cottages, divided by pretty gardens, wholly unchanged in size or appearance, unincreased and undiminished by a single brick. To be sure, yesterday evening a slight misfortune happened to our goodly tenement, occasioned by the unlucky diligence mentioned in my first notice, which, under the conduct of a sleepy coachman and a restive horse, contrived to knock down and demolish the wall of our court, and fairly to drive through the

front garden, thereby destroying in its course sundry curious stocks, carnations, and geraniums. The three insides (ladies) squalling from the interior of that commodious vehicle; the outsides (gentlemen) swearing on the roof; the coachman, still half asleep, but unconsciously blowing his horn; we in the house screaming and scolding; the passers-by shouting and hallooing; and May, who little brooked such an invasion of her territories, barking in her tremendous lion-note, and putting down the other noises like a clap of thunder. But passengers, coachman, horses, and spectators all righted at last; and there is no harm done but to my flowers and to the wall. May, however, stands bewailing the ruins, for that low wall was her favourite haunt; she used to parade backwards and forwards on the top of it, as if to show herself, just after the manner of a peacock on the top of a house; and would sit or lie for hours on the corner next the gate, basking in the sunshine like a marble statue. Really she has quite the air of one who laments the destruction of personal property; but the wall is to be rebuilt to-morrow, with old weather-stained bricks—no patchwork! and exactly in the same form; May herself will not find the difference; so that in the way of alteration this little misfortune will pass for nothing. Neither have we any improvements worth calling such. Except that the wheeler's green door hath been retouched, out of the same pot (as I judge from the tint) with which he furbished up our new-old pony-chaise; that the shop-window of our neighbour, the universal dealer, hath been beautified, and his name and calling splendidly set forth in yellow letters on a black ground; and that

our landlord of the Rose hath hoisted a new sign of unparalleled splendour; one side consisting of a full-faced damask rose, of the size and hue of a peony, the other of a maiden blush in profile, which looks exactly like a carnation, so that both flowers are considerably indebted to the modesty of the "out-of-door artist," who has warily written The Rose under each—except these trifling ornaments, which nothing but the jealous eye of a lover could detect, the dear place is altogether unchanged.

The only real improvement with which we have been visited for our sins—(I hate all innovations, whether for better or worse, as if I was a furious Tory, or a woman of threescore and ten)—the only misfortune of that sort which has befallen us is under foot. The road has been adjusted on the plan of Mr. Macadam; and a tremendous operation it is. I do not know what good may ensue; but for the last six months some part or other of the highway has been impassable for any feet, except such as are shod by the blacksmith; and even the four-footed people who wear iron shoes make wry faces, poor things! at those stones, enemies to man and beast. However, the business is nearly done now; we are covered with sharp flints every inch of us, except a "bad step" up the hill, which, indeed, looks like a bit cut out of the deserts of Arabia, fitter for camels and caravans than for Christian horses and coaches; a point which, in spite of my dislike of alteration, I was forced to acknowledge to our surveyor, a portly gentleman, who, in a smart gig, drawn by a prancing steed, was kicking up a prodigious dust at that very moment. He and I ought to be great enemies; for, besides the Macadamite enormity of the stony

road, he hath actually been guilty of tree murder, having been accessory before the fact in the death of three limes along the rope-walk—dear, sweet, innocent limes, that did no harm on earth except shading the path! I never should have forgiven that offence, had not their removal, by opening a beautiful view from the village up the hill, reconciled even my tree-loving eye to their abstraction. And, to say the truth, though we have had twenty little squabbles, there is no bearing malice with our surveyor; he is so civil and good-humoured, has such a bustling and happy self-importance, such an honest earnestness in his vocation (which is gratuitous, by-the-by), and such an intense conviction that the state of the turnpike road between B. and K. is the principal affair of this life, that I would not undeceive him for the world. How often have I seen him in a cold winter morning, with a face all frost and business, great-coated up to the eyes, driving from post to post, from one gang of labourers to another, praising, scolding, ordering, cheated, laughed at, and liked by them all! Well, when once the hill is finished, we shall have done with him for ever, as he used to tell me by way of consolation, when I shook my head at him, as he went jolting along over his dear new roads, at the imminent risk of his springs and his bones; we shall see no more of him; for the Macadam ways are warranted not to wear out. So be it; I never wish to see a road-mender again.

But if the form of outward things be all unchanged around us, if the dwellings of man remain the same to the sight and the touch, the little world within hath undergone its usual mutations—the hive is the same, but of the bees some are dead

and some are flown away, and some that we left insects in the shell are already putting forth their young wings. Children in our village really sprout up like mushrooms; the air is so promotive of growth, that the rogues spring into men and women, as if touched by Harlequin's wand, and are quite offended if one happens to say or do anything which has a reference to their previous condition. My father grievously affronted Sally L. only yesterday, by bestowing upon her a great lump of gingerbread, with which he had stuffed his pockets at a fair. She immediately, as she said, gave it to the "children." Now Sally cannot be above twelve, to my certain knowledge, though taller than I am. Lizzy herself is growing womanly. I actually caught that little lady stuck on a chest of drawers, contemplating herself in the glass, and striving with all her might to gather the rich curls that hung about her neck, and turn them under a comb. Well! If Sally and Lizzy live to be old maids, they may probably make the *amende honorable* to time, and wish to be thought young again. In the meanwhile, shall we walk up the street?

The first cottage is that of Mr. H., the patriot, the illuminator, the independent and sturdy yet friendly member of our little state, who, stout and comely, with a handsome chaise-cart, a strong mare, and a neat garden, might have passed for a portrait of that enviable class of Englishmen, who, after a youth of frugal industry, sit down in some retired place, to "live upon their means." He and his wife seemed the happiest couple on earth: except a little too much leisure, I never suspected that they had one trouble or one care. But Care, the witch, will

come everywhere, even to that happiest station, and this prettiest place. She came in one of her most terrific forms—blindness—or (which is perhaps still more tremendous) the faint glimmering light and gradual darkness which precede the total eclipse. For a long time we had missed the pleasant bustling officiousness, the little services, the voluntary tasks which our good neighbour loved so well. Fruit-trees were blighted, and escaped his grand specific, fumigation; wasps multiplied, and their nests remained untraced; the cheerful modest knock with which, just at the very hour when he knew it could be spared, he presented himself to ask for the newspaper, was heard no more; he no longer hung over his gate to waylay passengers, and entice them into chat; at last he even left off driving his little chaise, and was only seen moping up and down the garden-walk, or stealing gropingly from the wood-pile to the house. He evidently shunned conversation or questions, forbade his wife to tell what ailed him, and even when he put a green shade over his darkened eyes, fled from human sympathy with a stern pride that seemed almost ashamed of the humbling infirmity. That strange (but to a vigorous and healthy man perhaps natural) feeling soon softened. The disease increased hourly, and he became dependent on his excellent wife for every comfort and relief. She had many willing assistants in her labour of love; all his neighbours strove to return, according to their several means, the kindness which all had received from him in some shape or other. The country boys, to whose service he had devoted so much time, in shaping bats, constructing bows and arrows, and other quips and trickeries of

the same nature, vied with each other in performing little offices about the yard and stable; and John Evens, the half-witted gardener, to whom he had been a constant friend, repaid his goodness by the most unwearied attention. Gratitude even seemed to sharpen poor John's perception and faculties. There is an old man in our parish workhouse who occasionally walks through the streets, led by a little boy holding the end of a long stick. The idea of this man, who had lived in utter blindness for thirty years, was always singularly distressing to Mr. H. I shall never forget the address with which our simple gardener used to try to divert his attention from this miserable fellow-sufferer. He would get between them to prevent the possibility of recognition by the dim and uncertain vision; would talk loudly to drown the peculiar noise, the sort of duet of feet, caused by the quick short steps of the child, and the slow irregular tread of the old man; and, if any one ventured to allude to blind Robert, he would turn the conversation with an adroitness and acuteness which might put to shame the proudest intellect. So passed many months. At last Mr. H. was persuaded to consult a celebrated oculist, and the result was most comforting. The disease was ascertained to be a cataract; and now with the increase of darkness came an increase of hope. The film spread, thickened, ripened, speedily and healthily; and to-day the requsite operation has been performed with equal skill and success. You may still see some of the country boys lingering round the gate with looks of strong and wondering interest; poor John is going to and fro, he knows not for what, unable to rest a moment; Mrs. H., too, is walking in the

garden, shedding tears of thankfulness; and he who came to support their spirit, the stout strong-hearted farmer A., seems trembling and overcome. The most tranquil person in the house is probably the patient: he bore the operation with resolute firmness, and *he has seen again.* Think of the bliss bound up in those four word! He is in darkness now, and must remain so for some weeks; but he has seen, and he will see; and that humble cottage is again a happy dwelling.

Next we come to the shoemaker's abode. All is unchanged there, except that its master becomes more industrious and more pale-faced, and that his fair daughter is a notable exemplification of the development which I have already noticed amongst our young things. But she is in the real transition state, just emerging from the chrysalis, and the eighteen months, between fourteen and a half and sixteen, would metamorphose a child into a woman all the world over. She is still pretty, but not so elegant as when she wore frocks and pinafores, and unconsciously classical, parted her long brown locks in the middle of her forehead, and twisted them up in a knot behind, giving to her finely shaped head and throat the air of a Grecian statue. Then she was stirring all day in her small housewifery, or her busy idleness, delving and digging in her flower-border, tossing and dandling every infant that came within her reach, feeding pigs and poultry, playing with May, and prattling with an open-hearted frankness to the country lads, who assemble at evening in the shop to enjoy a little gentle gossiping; for be it known to my London readers, that the shoemaker's in a country village is now what (according to tradition

and the old novels) the barber's used to be—the resort of all the male newsmongers, especially the young. Then she talked to these visitors gaily and openly, sang, and laughed, and ran in and out, and took no more thought of a young man than of a gosling. Then she was only fourteen. Now she wears gowns and aprons—puts her hair in paper—has left off singing, talks—has left off running, walks—nurses the infants with a grave solemn grace—has entirely cut her former playmate, Mayflower, who tosses her pretty head as much as to say—who cares?—and has nearly renounced all acquaintance with the visitors to the shop, who are by no means disposed to take matters so quietly. There she stands on the threshold, shy and demure, just vouchsafing a formal nod or a faint smile as they pass, and if she in her turn be compelled to pass the open door of their newsroom (for the working apartment is separate from the house), edging along as slyly and mincingly as if there were no such beings as young men in the world. Exquisite coquette! I think (she is my opposite neighbour, and I have a right to watch her doings—the right of retaliation) there is one youth particularly distinguished by her non-notice, one whom she never will see nor speak to, who stands a very fair chance to carry her off. He is called Jem Tanner, and is a fine lad, with an open ruddy countenance, a clear blue eye, and curling hair of that tint which the poets are pleased to denominate golden. Though not one of our eleven, he was a promising cricketer. We have missed him lately on the green at the Sunday evening game, and I find on inquiry that he now frequents a chapel about a mile off, where he is the best male-singer, as our nymph of the shoe-

shop is incomparably the first female. I am not fond of betting; but I would venture the lowest stake of gentility, a silver threepence, that, before the winter ends, a wedding will be the result of these weekly meetings at the chapel. In the long dark evenings, when the father has enough to do in piloting the mother with conjugal gallantry through the dirty lanes, think of the opportunity that Jem will have to escort the daughter! A little difficulty he may have to encounter: the lass will be coy for a while; the mother will talk of their youth, the father of their finances; but the marriage, I doubt not, will ensue.

Next in order, on the other side of the street, is the blacksmith's house. Change has been busy here in a different and more awful form. Our sometime constable, the tipsiest of parish officers, of blacksmiths, and of men, is dead. Returning from a revel with a companion as full of beer as himself, one or the other, or both, contrived to overset the cart in a ditch (the living scapegrace is pleased to lay the blame of the mishap on the horse, but that is contrary to all probability, this respectable quadruped being a water-drinker); and inward bruises, acting on inflamed blood and an impaired constitution, carried him off in a very short time, leaving an ailing wife and eight children, the eldest of whom is only fourteen years of age. This sounds like a very tragical story; yet, perhaps, because the loss of a drunken husband is not quite so great a calamity as the loss of a sober one, the effect of this event is not altogether so melancholy as might be expected. The widow, when she was a wife, had a complaining, broken-spirited air, a peevish manner, a whining voice, a dismal countenance, and a person so neglected and slovenly, that

it was difficult to believe that she had once been remarkably handsome. She is now quite another woman. The very first Sunday she put on her weeds, we all observed how tidy and comfortable she looked, how much her countenance, in spite of a decent show of tears, was improved, and how completely through all her sighings her tone had lost its peevishness. I have never seen her out of spirits or out of humour since. She talks and laughs and bustles about, managing her journeymen and scolding her children as notably as any dame in the parish. The very house looks more cheerful; she has cut down the old willow trees that stood in the court and let in the light; and now the sun glances brightly from the casement windows, and plays amidst the vine-leaves and the clusters of grapes which cover the walls; the door is newly painted, and shines like the face of its mistress; even the forge has lost half its dinginess. Everything smiles. She indeed talks by fits of "poor George," especially when any allusion to her old enemy, mine host of the Rose, brings the deceased to her memory: then she bewails (as is proper) her dear husband and her desolate condition; calls herself a lone widow; sighs over her eight children; complains of the troubles of business, and tries to persuade herself and others that she is as wretched as a good wife ought to be. But this will not do. She is a happier woman than she has been any time these fifteen years, and she knows it. My dear village husbands, if you have a mind that your wives should be really sorry when you die, whether by a fall from a cart or otherwise, keep from the ale-house!

Next comes the tall thin red house, that ought to

boast genteeler inmates than its short fat mistress, its children, its pigs, and its quantity of noise, happiness, and vulgarity. The din is greater than ever. The husband, a merry jolly tar, with a voice that sounds as if issuing from a speaking-trumpet, is returned from a voyage to India; and another little one, a chubby roaring boy, has added his lusty cries to the family concert.

This door, blockaded by huge bales of goods, and half darkened by that moving mountain, the tilted waggon of the S. mill, which stands before it, belongs to the village shop. Increase has been here too in every shape. Within fourteen months two little pretty quiet girls have come into the world. Before Fanny could well manage to totter across the road to her good friend the nymph of the shoe-shop, Margaret made her appearance; and poor Fanny, discarded at once from the maid's arms and her mother's knee, degraded from the rank and privileges of "the baby" (for at that age precedence is strangely reversed), would have had a premature foretaste of the instability of human felicity, had she not taken refuge with that best of nurses, a fond father. Everything thrives about the shop, from the rosy children to the neat maid and the smart apprentice. No room now for lodgers, and no need! The young mantua-making schoolmistresses, the old inmates, are gone; one of them not very far. She grew tired of scolding little boys and girls about their A B C, and of being scolded in her turn by their sisters and mothers about pelisses and gowns; so she gave up both trades almost a year ago, and has been ever since our pretty Harriet. I do not think she has ever repented of the exchange, though it might not

perhaps have been made so soon, had not her elder sister, who had been long engaged to an attendant at one of the colleges of Oxford, thought herself on the point of marriage just as the housemaid left us. Poor Betsy! She had shared the fate of many a prouder maiden, wearing out her youth in expectation of the promotion that was to authorise her union with the man of her heart. Many a year had she waited in smiling constancy, fond of William in no common measure, and proud of him, as well she might be; for, when the vacation so far lessened his duties as to render a short absence practicable, and he stole up here for a few days to enjoy her company, it was difficult to distinguish him in air and manner, as he sauntered about in elegant indolence with his fishing rod and his flute, from the young Oxonians, his masters. At last promotion came; and Betsy, apprised of it by an affectionate and congratulatory letter from his sister, prepared her wedding-clothes, and looked hourly for the bridegroom. No bridegroom came. A second letter announced, with regret and indignation, that William had made another choice, and was to be married early in the ensuing month. Poor Betsy! We were alarmed for her health, almost for her life. She wept incessantly, took no food, wandered recklessly about from morning till night, lost her natural rest, her flesh, her colour; and in less than a week she was so altered that no one would have known her. Consolation and remonstrance were alike rejected, till at last Harriet happened to strike the right chord by telling her that "she wondered at her want of spirit." This was touching her on the point of honour; she had always been remarkably high-spirited, and could as little

brook the imputation as a soldier or a gentleman. This lucky suggestion gave an immediate turn to her feelings: anger and scorn succeeded to grief; she wiped her eyes, "hemmed away a sigh," and began to scold most manfully. She did still better. She recalled an old admirer, who, in spite of repeated objections, had remained constant in his attachment, and made such good speed that she was actually married the day before her faithless lover, and is now the happy wife of a very respectable tradesman.

Ah! the in-and-out cottage! the dear, dear home! No weddings there! No changes! except that the white kitten, who sits purring at a window under the great myrtle, has succeeded to his lamented grandfather, our beautiful Persian cat, I cannot find one alteration to talk about. The wall of the court indeed—but that will be mended to-morrow.

Here is the new sign, the well-frequented Rose inn. Plenty of changes there! Our landlord is always improving, if it be only a pig-sty or a watering trough—plenty of changes and one splendid wedding. Miss Phœbe is married, not to her old lover the recruiting sergeant (for he had one wife already, probably more), but to a patten-maker, as arrant a dandy as ever wore mustachios. How Phœbe could "abase her eyes" from the stately sergeant to this youth, half a foot shorter than herself, whose "waist would go into any alderman's thumb-ring," might, if the final choice of a coquette had ever been matter of wonder, have occasioned some speculation. But our patten-maker is a man of spirit; and the wedding was of extraordinary splendour. Three gigs, each containing four persons, graced the procession, besides numerous carts and innumerable pedestrians. The bride was

equipped in muslin and satin, and really looked very pretty with her black sparkling eyes, her clear brown complexion, her blushes and her smiles; the bride-maidens were only less smart than the bride; and the bridegroom was "point device in his accoutrements," and as munificent as a nabob. Cake flew about the village; plum-puddings were abundant; and strong beer, ay, even mine host's best double X, was profusely distributed. There was all manner f eating and drinking, with singing, fiddling, and dancing between; and in the evening, to crown all, there was Mr. Moon, the conjuror. Think of that stroke of good fortune—Mr. Moon, the very pearl of all conjurors, who had the honour of puzzling and delighting their late Majesties with his "wonderful and pleasing exhibition of Thaumaturgics, Tachygraphy, mathematical operations, and magical deceptions," happened to arrive about an hour before dinner, and commenced his ingenious deceptions very unintentionally at our house. Calling to apply for permission to perform in the village, being equipped in a gay scarlet coat, and having something smart and sportsman-like in his appearance, he was announced by Harriet as one of the gentlemen of the C. hunt, and taken (*mis*taken I should have said) by the whole family for a certain captain newly arrived in the neighbourhood. That misunderstanding, which must, I think, have retaliated on Mr. Moon a little of the puzzlement that he inflicts on others, vanished of course at the production of his bill of fare; and the requested permission was instantly given. Never could he have arrived in a happier hour! Never were spectators more gratified or more scared. All the tricks prospered. The cock crew after his head was

cut off; and half-crowns and sovereigns flew about as if winged; and the very wedding-ring could not escape Mr. Moon's incantations. We heard of nothing else for a week. From the bridegroom, *un esprit fort*, who defied all manner of conjuration and *diablerie*, down to my Lizzy, whose boundless faith swallows the Arabian Tales, all believed and trembled. So thoroughly were men, women, and children impressed with the idea of the worthy conjuror's dealings with the devil, that when he had occasion to go to B., not a soul would give him a cast, from pure awe; and if it had not been for our pony-chaise, poor Mr. Moon must have walked. I hope he is really a prophet; for he foretold all happiness to the new-married pair.

So this pretty white house with the lime-trees before it, which has been under repair for these three years, is on the point of being finished. The vicar has taken it, as the vicarage-house is not yet fit for his reception. He has sent before him a neat modest maid-servant, whose respectable appearance gives a character to her master and mistress—a hamper full of flower-roots, sundry boxes of books, a pianoforte, and some simple and useful furniture. Well, we shall certainly have neighbours, and I have a presentiment that we shall find friends.

Lizzy, you may now come along with me round the corner and up the lane, just to the end of the wheeler's shop, and then we shall go home, it is high time. What is this *affiche* in the parlour window? "Apartments to let—inquire within." These are certainly the curate's lodgings—Is he going away? Oh, I suppose the new vicar will do his own duty—yet, however well he may do it, rich and poor will

regret the departure of Mr. B. Well, I hope that he may soon get a good living. "Lodgings to let"—whoever thought of seeing such a placard hereabouts? The lodgings, indeed, are very convenient for "a single gentleman, a man and his wife, or two sisters," as the newspapers say—comfortable apartments, neat and tasty withal, and the civilest of all civil treatment from the host and hostess. But who would ever have dreamt of such a notice? Lodgings to let in our village!

A COUNTRY CRICKET-MATCH.

I DOUBT if there be any scene in the world more animating or delightful than a cricket-match—I do not mean a set match at Lord's Ground for money, hard money, between a certain number of gentlemen and players, as they are called—people who make a trade of that noble sport, and degrade it into an affair of bettings, and hedgings, and cheatings, it may be, like boxing or horse-racing; nor do I mean a pretty *fête* in a gentleman's park, where one club of cricketing dandies encounter another such club, and where they show off in graceful costume to a gay marquee of admiring belles, who condescend so to purchase admiration, and while away a long summer morning in partaking cold collations, conversing occasionally, and seeming to understand the game—the whole being conducted according to ball-room etiquette, so as to be exceedingly elegant and exceedingly dull. No! the cricket that I mean is a real solid old-fashioned match between neighbouring parishes, where each attacks the other for honour and a supper, glory and half-a-crown a man. If there be any gentleman amongst them, it is well—if not, it is so much the better. Your gentleman cricketer is in general rather an anomalous character.

Elderly gentlemen are obviously good for nothing; and your beaux are, for the most part, hampered and trammelled by dress and habit; the stiff cravat, the pinched-in-waist, the dandy-walk—oh, they will never do for cricket! Now, our country lads, accustomed to the flail or the hammer (your blacksmiths are capital hitters) have the free use of their arms; they know how to move their shoulders; and they can move their feet too—they can run; then they are so much better made, so much more athletic, and yet so much lissomer—to use a Hampshire phrase, which deserves at least to be good English. Here and there, indeed, one meets with an old Etonian, who retains his boyish love for that game which formed so considerable a branch of his education; some even preserve their boyish proficiency, but in general it wears away like the Greek, quite as certainly, and almost as fast; a few years of Oxford, or Cambridge, or the continent, are sufficient to annihilate both the power and the inclination. No! a village match is the thing—where our highest officer—our conductor (to borrow a musical term) is but a little farmer's second son; where a day-labourer is our bowler, and a blacksmith our long-stop; where the spectators consist of the retired cricketers, the veterans of the green, the careful mothers, the girls, and all the boys of two parishes, together with a few amateurs, little above them in rank, and not at all in pretension; where laughing and shouting, and the very ecstasy of merriment and good-humour prevail: such a match, in short, as I attended yesterday, at the expense of getting twice wet through, and as I would attend to-morrow, at the certainty of having that ducking doubled.

For the last three weeks our village has been in a

state of great excitement, occasioned by a challenge from our north-western neighbours, the men of B., to contend with us at cricket. Now, we have not been much in the habit of playing matches. Three or four years ago, indeed, we encountered the men of S., our neighbours south-by-east, with a sort of doubtful success, beating them on our own ground, whilst they in the second match returned the compliment on theirs. This discouraged us. Then an unnatural coalition between a high-church curate and an evangelical gentleman-farmer drove our lads from the Sunday-evening practice, which, as it did not begin before both services were concluded, and as it tended to keep the young men from the ale-house, our magistrates had winked at if not encouraged. The sport, therefore, had languished until the present season, when under another change of circumstances the spirit began to revive. Half-a-dozen fine active lads, of influence amongst their comrades, grew into men and yearned for cricket; an enterprising publican gave a set of ribands: his rival, mine host of the Rose, an out-doer by profession, gave two; and the clergyman and his lay ally, both well-disposed and good-natured men, gratified by the submission to their authority, and finding, perhaps, that no great good resulted from the substitution of public-houses for out-of-door diversions, relaxed. In short, the practice recommenced, and the hill was again alive with men and boys, and innocent merriment; but farther than the riband matches amongst ourselves nobody dreamed of going, till this challenge—we were modest, and doubted our own strength. The B. people, on the other hand, must have been braggers born, a whole parish of gasconaders. Never was such

boasting! such crowing! such ostentatious display of practice! such mutual compliments from man to man —bowler to batter, batter to bowler! It was a wonder they did not challenge all England. It must be confessed that we were a little astounded; yet we firmly resolved not to decline the combat; and one of the most spirited of the new growth, William Grey by name, took up the glove in a style of manly courtesy, that would have done honour to a knight in the days of chivalry.—"We were not professed players," he said, "being little better than school-boys, and scarcely older; but, since they had done us the honour to challenge us, we would try our strength. It would be no discredit to be beaten by such a field."

Having accepted the wager of battle, our champion began forthwith to collect his forces. William Grey is himself one of the finest youths that one shall see —tall, active, slender and yet strong, with a piercing eye full of sagacity, and a smile full of good humour —a farmer's son by station, and used to hard work as farmers' sons are now, liked by everybody, and admitted to be an excellent cricketer. He immediately set forth to muster his men, remembering with great complacency that Samuel Long, a bowler *comme il y en a peu*, the very man who had knocked down nine wickets, had beaten us, bowled us out at the fatal return match some years ago at S., had luckily, in a remove of a quarter of a mile last Lady-day, crossed the boundaries of his old parish, and actually belonged to us. Here was a stroke of good fortune! Our captain applied to him instantly; and he agreed at a word. Indeed, Samuel Long is a very civilised person. He is a middle-aged man, who looks rather old amongst our young lads, and whose

thickness and breadth gave no token of remarkable activity; but he is very active, and so steady a player! so safe! We had half gained the match when we had secured him. He is a man of substance, too, in every way; owns one cow, two donkeys, six pigs, and geese and ducks beyond count—dresses like a farmer, and owes no man a shilling—and all this from pure industry, sheer day-labour. Note that your good cricketer is commonly the most industrious man in the parish; the habits that make him such are precisely those which make a good workman—steadiness, sobriety, and activity—Samuel Long might pass for the *beau ideal* of the two characters. Happy were we to possess him! Then we had another piece of good luck. James Brown, a journeyman blacksmith and a native, who, being of a rambling disposition, had roamed from place to place for half-a-dozen years, had just returned to settle with his brother at another corner of our village, bringing with him a prodigious reputation in cricket and in gallantry—the gay Lothario of the neighbourhood. He is said to have made more conquests in love and in cricket than any blacksmith in the county. To him also went the indefatigable William Grey, and he also consented to play. No end to our good fortune! Another celebrated batter, called Joseph Hearne, had likewise recently married into the parish. He worked, it is true, at the A. mills, but slept at the house of his wife's father in our territories. He also was sought and found by our leader. But he was grand and shy; made an immense favour of the thing; courted courting and then hung back—"Did not know that he could be spared; had partly resolved not to play again—at least not this season; thought

it rash to accept the challenge; thought they might do without him——" "Truly I think so too," said our spirited champion; "we will not trouble you, Mr. Hearne."

Having thus secured two powerful auxiliaries, and rejected a third, we began to reckon and select the regular native forces. Thus ran our list:—William Grey, 1.—Samuel Long, 2.—James Brown, 3.—George and John Simmons, one capital, the other so-so—an uncertain hitter, but a good fieldsman, 5.—Joel Brent, excellent, 6.—Ben Appleton—here was a little pause—Ben's abilities at cricket were not completely ascertained; but then he was so good a fellow, so full of fun and waggery! no doing without Ben. So he figured in the list, 7.—George Harris—a short halt there too! Slowish—slow but sure. I think the proverb brought him in, 8.—Tom Coper—oh, beyond the world, Tom Coper! the red-headed gardening lad, whose left-handed strokes send *her* (a cricket-ball, like that other moving thing, a ship, is always of the feminine gender), send her spinning a mile, 9.—Harry Willis, another blacksmith, 10.

We had now ten of our eleven, but the choice of the last occasioned some demur. Three young Martins, rich farmers of the neighbourhood, successively presented themselves, and were all rejected by our independent and impartial general for want of merit—*cricketal* merit. "Not good enough," was his pithy answer. Then our worthy neighbour, the half-pay lieutenant, offered his services—he, too, though with some hesitation and modesty, was refused—"Not quite young enough" was his sentence. John Strong, the exceeding long son of our dwarfish mason, was the next candidate—a nice youth—

everybody likes John Strong—and a willing, but so tall and so limp, bent in the middle—a thread-paper, six-feet high! We were all afraid that, in spite of his name, his strength would never hold out. "Wait till next year, John," quoth William Grey, with all the dignified seniority of twenty speaking to eighteen. "Coper's a year younger," said John. "Coper's a foot shorter," replied William: so John retired: and the eleventh man remained unchosen, almost to the eleventh hour. The eve of the match arrived, and the post was still vacant, when a little boy of fifteen, David Willis, brother to Harry, admitted by accident to the last practice, saw eight of them out, and was voted in by acclamation.

That Sunday evening's practice (for Monday was the important day) was a period of great anxiety, and, to say the truth, of great pleasure. There is something strangely delightful in the innocent spirit of party. To be one of a numerous body, to be authorised to say *we*, to have a rightful interest in triumph or defeat, is gratifying at once to social feeling and to personal pride. There was not a ten-year old urchin, or a septuagenary woman in the parish who did not feel an additional importance, a reflected consequence, in speaking of "our side." An election interests in the same way; but that feeling is less pure. Money is there, and hatred, and politics, and lies. Oh, to be a voter, or a voter's wife, comes nothing near the genuine and hearty sympathy of belonging to a parish, breathing the same air, looking on the same trees, listening to the same nightingales! Talk of a patriotic elector! Give me a parochial patriot, a man who loves his parish! Even we, the female partisans, may partake the

common ardour. I am sure I did. I never, though tolerably eager and enthusiastic at all times, remember being in a more delicious state of excitement than on the eve of that battle. Our hopes waxed stronger and stronger. Those of our players who were present were excellent. William Grey got forty notches off his own bat; and that brilliant hitter, Tom Coper, gained eight from two successive balls. As the evening advanced, too, we had encouragement of another sort. A spy, who had been despatched to reconnoitre the enemy's quarters, returned from their practising ground with a most consolatory report. "Really," said Charles Grover, our intelligence—a fine old steady judge, one who had played well in his day—"they are no better than so many old women. Any five of ours would beat their eleven." This sent us to bed in high spirits.

Morning dawned less favourably. The sky promised a series of deluging showers, and kept its word as English skies are wont to do on such occasions; and a lamentable message arrived at the head-quarters from our trusty comrade Joel Brent. His master, a great farmer, had begun the hay-harvest that very morning, and Joel, being as eminent in one field as in another, could not be spared. Imagine Joel's plight! the most ardent of all our eleven! a knight held back from the tourney! a soldier from the battle! The poor swain was inconsolable. At last, one who is always ready to do a good-natured action, great or little, set forth to back his petition; and, by dint of appealing to the public spirit of our worthy neighbour and the state of the barometer, talking alternately of the parish honour and thunder-showers, of lost

matches and sopped hay, he carried his point, and returned triumphantly with the delighted Joel.

In the meantime we became sensible of another defalcation. On calling over our roll, Brown was missing; and the spy of the preceding night, Charles Grover—the universal scout and messenger of the village, a man who will run half-a-dozen miles for a pint of beer, who does errands for the very love of the trade, who, if he had been a lord, would have been an ambassador—was instantly despatched to summon the truant. His report spread general consternation. Brown had set off at four o'clock in the morning to play in a cricket-match at M., a little town twelve miles off, which had been his last residence. Here was desertion! Here was treachery! Here was treachery against that goodly state, our parish! To send James Brown to Coventry was the immediate resolution; but even that seemed too light a punishment for such delinquency. Then how we cried him down! At ten on Sunday night (for the rascal had actually practised with us, and never said a word of his intended disloyalty) he was our faithful mate, and the best player (take him for all in all) of the eleven. At ten in the morning he had run away, and we were well rid of him; he was no batter compared with William Grey or Tom Coper; not fit to wipe the shoes of Samuel Long, as a bowler; nothing of a scout to John Simmons; the boy David Willis was worth fifty of him—

> "I trust we have within our realm,
> Five hundred good as he,"

was the universal sentiment. So we took tall John

Strong, who, with an incurable hankering after the honour of being admitted, had kept constantly with the players, to take the chance of some such accident —we took John for our *pisaller*. I never saw any one prouder than the good-humoured lad was of this not very flattering piece of preferment.

John Strong was elected, and Brown sent to Coventry; and when I first heard of his delinquency, I thought the punishment only too mild for the crime. But I have since learned the secret history of the offence (if we could know the secret histories of all offences, how much better the world would seem than it does now!) and really my wrath is much abated. It was a piece of gallantry, of devotion to the sex, or rather a chivalrous obedience to one chosen fair. I must tell my readers the story. Mary Allen, the prettiest girl of M., had, it seems, revenged upon our blacksmith the numberless inconsistencies of which he stood accused. He was in love over head and ears, but the nymph was cruel. She said no, and no, and no, and poor Brown, three times rejected, at last resolved to leave the place, partly in despair, and partly in that hope which often mingles strangely with a lover's despair, the hope that when he was gone he should be missed. He came home to his brother's accordingly; but for five weeks he heard nothing from or of the inexorable Mary, and was glad to beguile his own "vexing thoughts" by endeavouring to create in his mind an artificial and factitious interest in our cricket-match—all unimportant as such a trifle must have seemed to a man in love. Poor James, however, is a social and warm-hearted person, not likely to resist a contagious sympathy.

As the time for the play advanced, the interest which he had at first affected became genuine and sincere: and he was really, when he left the ground on Sunday night, almost as enthusiastically absorbed in the event of the next day as Joel Brent himself. He little foresaw the new and delightful interest which awaited him at home, where, on the moment of his arrival, his sister-in-law and confidante presented him with a billet from the lady of his heart. It had, with the usual delay of letters sent by private hands in that rank of life, loitered on the road, in a degree inconceivable to those who are accustomed to the punctual speed of the post, and had taken ten days for its twelve miles' journey. Have my readers any wish to see this *billet-doux?* I can show them (but in strict confidence) a literal copy. It was addressed,

"For mistur jem browne
"blaxmith by
"S."

The inside ran thus:—"Mistur browne this is to Inform you that oure parish plays bramley men next monday is a week, i think we shall lose without yew. from your humbell servant to command

"MARY ALLEN."

Was there ever a prettier relenting? a summons more flattering, more delicate, more irresistible? The precious epistle was undated; but, having ascertained who brought it, and found, by cross-examining the messenger, that the Monday in question was the very next day, we were not surprised to find that *Mistur browne* forgot his engagement to us, forgot all but Mary and Mary's letter, and

set off at four o'clock the next morning to walk twelve miles, and play for her parish, and in her sight. Really we must not send James Brown to Coventry—must we? Though if, as his sister-in-law tells our damsel Harriet he hopes to do, he should bring the fair Mary home as his bride, he will not greatly care how little we say to him. But he must not be sent to Coventry—True-love forbid!

At last we were all assembled, and marched down to H. common, the appointed ground, which, though in our dominions according to the maps, was the constant practising place of our opponents, and *terra incognita* to us. We found our adversaries on the ground as we expected, for our various delays had hindered us from taking the field so early as we wished; and, as soon as we had settled all preliminaries, the match began.

But, alas! I have been so long settling my preliminaries, that I have left myself no room for the detail of our victory, and must squeeze the account of our grand achievements into as little compass as Cowley, when he crammed the names of eleven of his mistresses into the narrow space of four eight-syllable lines. *They* began the warfare—those boastful men of B. And what think you, gentle reader, was the amount of their innings! These challengers—the famous eleven—how many did they get? Think! imagine! guess!—You cannot?—Well!—they got twenty-two, or, rather, they got twenty; for two of theirs were short notches, and would never have been allowed, only that, seeing what they were made of, we and our umpires were not particular.—They should have had twenty more if they had chosen to claim them. Oh, how well we

fielded! and how well we bowled! our good play had quite as much to do with their miserable failure as their bad. Samuel Long is a slow bowler, George Simmons a fast one, and the change from Long's lobbing to Simmons's fast balls posed them completly. Poor simpletons! they were always wrong, expecting the slow for the quick, and the quick for the slow. Well, we went in. And what were our innings? Guess again!—guess! A hundred and sixty-nine! in spite of soaking showers, and wretched ground, where the ball would not run a yard, we headed them by a hundred and forty-seven; and then they gave in, as well they might. William Grey pressed them much to try another innings. "There was so much chance," as he courteously observed, "in cricket, that advantageous as our position seemed, we might, very possibly, be overtaken. The B. men had better try." But they were beaten sulky, and would not move—to my great disappointment; I wanted to prolong the pleasure of success. What a glorious sensation it is to be for five hours together—winning—winning! always feeling what a whist-player feels when he takes up four honours, seven trumps! Who would think that a little bit of leather, and two pieces of wood, had such a delightful and delighting power!

The only drawback on my enjoyment was the failure of the pretty boy, David Willis, who, injudiciously put in first, and playing for the first time in a match amongst men and strangers, who talked to him, and stared at him, was seized with such a fit of shamefaced shyness, that he could scarcely hold his bat, and was bowled out without a stroke, from actual nervousness. "He will come off that,"

Tom Coper says—I am afraid he will. I wonder whether Tom had ever any modesty to lose. Our other modest lad, John Strong, did very well; his length told in fielding, and he got good fame. Joel Brent, the rescued mower, got into a scrape, and out of it again; his fortune for the day. He ran out his mate, Samuel Long; who, I do believe, but for the excess of Joel's eagerness, would have stayed in till this time, by which exploit he got into sad disgrace; and then he himself got thirty-seven runs, which redeemed his reputation. William Grey made a hit which actually lost the cricket-ball. We think she lodged in a hedge, a quarter of a mile off, but nobody could find her. And George Simmons had nearly lost his shoe, which he tossed away in a passion, for having been caught out, owing to the ball glancing against it. These, together with a very complete somerset of Ben Appleton, our long-stop, who floundered about in the mud, making faces and attitudes as laughable as Grimaldi, none could tell whether by accident or design, were the chief incidents of the scene of action. Amongst the spectators nothing remarkable occurred, beyond the general calamity of two or three drenchings, except that a form, placed by the side of a hedge, under a very insufficient shelter, was knocked into the ditch, in a sudden rush of the cricketers to escape a pelting shower, by which means all parties shared the fate of Ben Appleton, some on land and some by water; and that, amidst the scramble, a saucy gipsy of a girl contrived to steal from the knee of the demure and well-appareled Samuel Long, a smart handkerchief which his careful dame had tied round it to preserve his new (what is the mincing feminine word?)—his new—inexpressibles, thus reversing the

story of Desdemona, and causing the new Othello to call aloud for his handkerchief, to the great diversion of the company. And so we parted; the players retired to their supper, and we to our homes; all wet through, all good-humoured and happy—except the losers.

To-day we are happy too. Hats, with ribands in them, go glancing up and down; and William Grey says, with a proud humility, "We do not challenge any parish; but if we be challenged, we are ready."

A MORNING RAMBLE.

MAY the 3d. Cold, bright weather. All within doors sunny and chilly; all without windy and dusty. It is quite tantalising to see that brilliant sun careering through so beautiful a sky, and to feel little more warmth from his presence than one does from that of his fair but cold sister, the moon. Even the sky, beautiful as it is, has the look of that one sometimes sees in a very bright moonlight night—deeply intensely blue, with white clouds driven vigorously along by a strong breeze—now veiling, and now exposing the dazzling luminary around which they sail. A beautiful sky! and, in spite of its coldness, a beautiful world! The effect of this backward spring has been to arrest the early flowers, to which heat is the great enemy; whilst the leaves and the later flowers have, nevertheless, ventured to peep out slowly and cautiously in sunny places—exhibiting in the copses and hedgerows a pleasant mixture of March and May. And we, poor chilly mortals, must follow, as nearly as we can, the wise example of the May blossoms, by avoiding bleak paths and open commons, and creeping up the sheltered road to the

vicarage—the pleasant sheltered road, where the western sun steals in between two rows of bright green elms, and the east wind is fenced off by the range of woody hills which rise abruptly before us, forming so striking a boundary to the picture.

How pretty this lane is, with its tall elms, just dressed in their young leaves, bordering the sunny path, or sweeping in a semicircle behind the clear pools and the white cottages that are scattered along the way! You shall seldom see a cottage hereabout without an accompanying pond, all alive with geese and ducks, at the end of the little garden. Ah! here is Dame Simmons making a most original use of her piece of water, standing on the bank that divides it from her garden, and most ingeniously watering her onion-bed with a new mop—now a dip, and now a twirl! Really, I give her credit for the invention. It is as good an imitation of a shower as one should wish to see on a summer-day. A squirt is nothing to it!

And here is another break to the tall line of elms—the gate that leads into Farmer Thorpe's great enclosures. Eight, ten, fourteen people in this large field, wheat-hoeing. The couple nearest the gate, who keep aloof from all the rest, and are hoeing this furrow so completely in concert, step by step, and stroke for stroke, are Jem Tanner and Mabel Green. There is not a handsomer pair in the field or in the village. Jem, with his bright complexion, his curling hair, his clear blue eye, and his trim figure—set off to great advantage by his short jacket and trousers and new straw hat; Mabel, with her little stuff gown, and her white handkerchief and apron—defining so exactly her light and flexible shape—

and her black eyes flashing from under a deep bonnet lined with pink, whose reflection gives to her bright dark countenance and dimpled cheeks a glow innocently artificial, which was the only charm that they wanted.

Jem and Mabel are, beyond all doubt, the handsomest couple in the field, and I am much mistaken if each have not a vivid sense of the charms of the other. Their mutual admiration was clear enough in their work; but it speaks still more plainly in their idleness. Not a stroke have they done for these five minutes; Jem, propped on his hoe, and leaning across the furrow, whispering soft nonsense; Mabel, blushing and smiling—now making believe to turn away—now listening, and looking up with a sweeter smile than ever, and a blush that makes her bonnet-lining pale. Ah, Mabel! Mabel! Now they are going to work again—no!—after three or four strokes the hoes have somehow become entangled, and without either advancing a step nearer the other, they are playing with these rustic implements as pretty a game at romps—showing off as nice a piece of rural flirtation—as ever was exhibited since wheat was hoed.

Ah, Mabel! Mabel! beware of Farmer Thorpe! He'll see at a glance that little will his corn profit by such labours. Beware, too, Jem Tanner!—for Mabel is, in some sort, an heiress; being the real niece and adopted daughter of our little lame clerk, who, although he looks such a tattered ragamuffin that the very grave-diggers are ashamed of him, is well to pass in the world—keeps a scrub pony—indeed he can hardly walk up the aisle—hath a

share in the County fire-office—and money in the funds. Mabel will be an heiress, despite the tatterdemalion costume of her honoured uncle, which I think he wears out of coquetry, that the remarks which might otherwise fall on his miserable person —full as misshapen as that of any Hunchback recorded in the Arabian Tales—may find a less offensive vent on his raiment. Certain such a figure hath seldom been beheld out of church or in. Yet will Mabel, nevertheless, be a fortune; and, therefore, she must inter-marry with another fortune, according to the rule made and provided in such cases; and the little clerk hath already looked her out a spouse, about his own standing —a widower in the next parish, with four children and a squint. Poor Jem Tanner! Nothing will that smart person or that pleasant speech avail with the little clerk—never will he officiate at your marriage to his niece—"Amen" would "stick in his throat." Poor things! in what a happy oblivion of the world and its cares, Farmer Thorpe and the wheat-hoeing, the squinting shopkeeper and the little clerk, are they, laughing and talking at this moment! Poor things! poor things!

Well, I must pursue my walk. How beautiful a mixture of flowers and leaves is in the high bank under this north hedge—quite an illustration of the blended seasons of which I spoke. An old irregular hedge-row is always beautiful, especially in the spring-time, when the grass, and mosses, and flowering weeds mingle best with the bushes and creeping plants that overhang them. But this bank is, most especially, various and lovely. Shall we try to analyse it? First, the clinging white-veined ivy,

which crawls up the slope in every direction, the masterpiece of that rich mosaic: then the brown leaves and the lilac blossoms of its fragrant namesake, the ground ivy, which grows here so profusely; then the late-lingering primrose; then the delicate wood-sorrel; then the regular pink stars of the cranesbill, with its beautiful leaves; then the golden oxslip and the cowslip, "cinque-spotted;" then the blue pansy, and the enamelled wild hyacinth; then the bright foliage of the brier-rose, which comes trailing its green wreaths amongst the flowers; then the bramble and the woodbine, creeping round the foot of a pollard oak, with its brown folded leaves; then a verdant mass—the blackthorn, with its lingering blossoms—the hawthorn, with its swelling buds—the bushy maple—the long stems of the hazel—and between them, hanging like a golden plume over the bank, a splendid tuft of the blossomed broom; then, towering high above all, the tall and leafy elms. And this is but a faint picture of this hedge, on the meadowy side of which sheep are bleating, and where every here and there a young lamb is thrusting its pretty head between the trees.

Who is this approaching? Farmer Thorpe? Yes, of a certainty, it is that substantial yeoman, sallying forth from his substantial farm-house, which peeps out from between two huge walnut-trees on the other side of the road, with intent to survey his labourers in the wheat-field. Farmer Thorpe is a stout, square, sturdy personage of fifty, or thereabout, with a hard weather-beaten countenance, of that peculiar vermilion, all over alike, into which the action of the sun and wind sometimes tans a fair complexion; sharp, shrewd features, and a keen grey eye. He looks

completely like a man who will neither cheat nor be cheated: and such is his character—an upright, downright English Yeoman—just always, and kind in a rough way—but given to fits of anger, and filled with an abhorrence of pilfering, and idleness, and trickery of all sorts, that makes him strict as a master, and somewhat stern at workhouse and vestry. I doubt if he will greatly relish the mode in which Jem and Mabel are administering the hoe in his wheat-drills. He will not reach the gate yet; for his usual steady, active pace is turned, by a recent accident, into an unequal, impatient halt—as if he were alike angry with his lameness and the cause. I must speak to him as he passes—not merely as a due courtesy to a good neighbour, but to give the delinquents in the field notice to resume their hoeing; but not a word of the limp—that is a sore subject.

"A fine day, Mr. Thorpe!"

"We want rain, ma'am!"

And on, with great civility, but without pausing a moment, he is gone. He'll certainly catch Mabel and her lover philandering over his wheat-furrows. Well, that may take its chance!—they have his lameness in their favour—only that the cause of that lameness has made the worthy farmer unusually cross. I think I must confide the story to my readers.

Gipsies and beggars do not in general much inhabit our neighbourhood; but about half-a-mile off there is a den so convenient for strollers and vagabonds, that it sometimes tempts the rogues to a few days' sojourn. It is, in truth, nothing more than a deserted brick-kiln, by the side of a lonely lane. But there is something so snug and comfortable

in the old building (always keeping in view gipsy notions of comfort); the blackened walls are so backed by the steep hill on whose side they are built—so fenced from the bleak north-east, and letting in so gaily the pleasant western sun; and the wide, rugged, impassable lane (used only as a road to the kiln, and with that abandoned) is at once so solitary and deserted, so close to the inhabited and populous world, that it seems made for a tribe whose prime requisites in a habitation are shelter, privacy, and a vicinity to farm-yards.

Accordingly, about a month ago, a pretty strong encampment, evidently gipsies, took up their abode in the kiln. The party consisted of two or three tall, lean, sinister-looking men, who went about the country mending pots and kettles, and driving a small trade in old iron; one or two children, unnaturally quiet, the spies of the crew; an old woman, who sold matches and told fortunes; a young woman with an infant strapped to her back, who begged; several hungry-looking dogs, and three ragged donkeys. The arrival of the vagabonds spread a general consternation through the village. Gamekeepers and housewives were in equal dismay. Snares were found in the preserves—poultry vanished from the farm-yards—a lamb was lost from the lea—and a damask table-cloth, belonging to the worshipful the Mayor of W——, was abstracted from the drying-ground of Rachel Strong, the most celebrated laundress in these parts, to whom it had been sent for the benefit of country washing. No end to the pilfering, and the stories of pilfering! The inhabitants of the kiln were not only thieves in themselves, but the cause of thievery in others. "The gipsies!" was

the answer general to every inquiry for things missing.

Farmer Thorpe—whose dwelling, with its variety of out-buildings—barns, ricks, and stables—is only separated by a meadow and a small coppice from the lane that leads to the gipsy retreat—was particularly annoyed by this visitation. Two couple of full-grown ducks, and a whole brood of early chickens, disappeared in one night; and Mrs. Thorpe fretted over the loss, and the farmer was indignant at the roguery. He set traps, let loose mastiffs, and put in action all the resources of village police—but in vain. Every night property went; and the culprits, however strongly suspected, still continued unamenable to the law.

At last, one morning, the great Chanticleer of the farm-yard—a cock of a million, with an unrivalled crow, a matchless strut, and plumage all gold and green, and orange and purple—gorgeous as a peacock, and fierce as a he-turkey—Chanticleer, the pride and glory of the yard, was missing! and Mrs. Thorpe's lamentations and her husband's anger redoubled. Vowing vengeance against the gipsies, he went to the door to survey a young blood mare of his own breeding; and as he stood at the gate—now bemoaning Chanticleer—now cursing the gipsies—now admiring the bay filly—his neighbour, Dame Simmons—the indentical lady of the mop, who occasionally chared at the house—came to give him the comfortable information that she had certainly heard Chanticleer—she was quite ready to swear to Chanticleer's voice—crowing in the brick-kiln. No time, she added, should be lost, if Farmer Thorpe wished to rescue that illustrious cock, and to punish the culprits—since

the gipsies, when she passed the place, were preparing to decamp.

No time *was* lost. In one moment Farmer Thorpe was on the bay filly's unsaddled back, with the halter for a bridle ; and, in the next, they were on full gallop towards the kiln. But, alas ! alas ! "the more haste the worst speed," says the wisdom of nations. Just as they arrived at the spot from which the procession —gipsies, dogs, and donkeys—and Chanticleer in a sack, shrieking most vigorously—were proceeding on their travels, the young blood mare—whether startled at the unusual *cortége*, or the rough ways, or the hideous noise of her old friend, the cock—suddenly reared and threw her master, who lay in all the agony of a sprained ankle, unable to rise from the ground ; whilst the whole tribe, with poor Chanticleer a prisoner, marched triumphantly past him, utterly regardless of his threats and imprecations. In this plight was the unlucky farmer discovered, about half-an-hour afterwards, by his wife, the constable, and a party of his own labourers, who came to give him assistance in securing the culprits ; of whom, notwithstanding an instant and active search through the neighbourhood, nothing has yet transpired. We shall hardly see them again in these parts, and have almost done talking of them. The village is returned to its old state of order and honesty ; the Mayor of W—— has replaced his table-cloth, and Mrs. Thorpe her cock ; and the poor farmer's lame ankle is all that remains to give token of the gipsies.

Here we are at the turning, which, edging round by the coppice, branches off to their sometime den : the other bend to the right leads up a gentle ascent to the vicarage, and that is our way. How fine a

view of the little parsonage we have from hence, between those arching elms, which enclose it like a picture in a frame! and how pretty a picture it forms, with its three pointed roofs, its snug porch, and its casement windows glittering from amid the china-roses! What a nest of peace and comfort! Farther on, almost at the summit of the hill, stands the old church with its massy tower—a row of superb lime-trees running along one side of the churchyard, and a cluster of dark yews shading the other. Few country churches have so much to boast in architectural beauty or in grandeur of situation.

We lose sight of it as we mount the hill, the lane narrowing and winding between deep banks, surmounted by high hedges, excluding all prospects till we reach the front of the vicarage, and catch across the gate of the opposite field a burst of country the most extensive and the most beautiful —field and village, mansion and cot, town and river, all smiling under the sparkling sun of May, and united and harmonised by the profusion of hedgerow timber in its freshest verdure, giving a rich woodland character to the scene, till it is terminated in the distance by the blue line of the Hampshire hills almost melting into the horizon. Such is the view from the vicarage. But it is too sunny and too windy to stand about out of doors, and time to finish our ramble. Down the hill, and round the corner, and past Farmer Thorpe's house, and one glance at the wheat-hoers, and then we will go home.

Ah! it is just as I feared. Jem and Mabel have been parted: they are now at opposite sides of the field—he looking very angry, working rapidly and violently, and doing more harm than good—she

looking tolerably sulky, and just moving her hoe, but evidently doing nothing at all. Farmer Thorpe, on his part, is standing in the middle of the field, observing, but pretending not to observe, the little humours of the separated lovers. There is a lurking smile about the corners of his mouth that bespeaks him more amused than angry. He is a kind person after all, and will certainly make no mischief. I should not even wonder if he espoused Jem Tanner's cause; and, for certain, if any one can prevail on the little clerk to give up his squinting favourite in favour of true love, Farmer Thorpe is the man.

WHITSUN-EVE.

THE pride of my heart and the delight of my eyes is my garden. Our house, which is in dimensions very much like a bird-cage, and might, with almost equal convenience, be laid on a shelf or hung up in a tree, would be utterly unbearable in wet weather were it not that we have a retreat out of doors, and a very pleasant retreat it is. To make my readers comprehend it I must describe our whole territories.

Fancy a small plot of ground with a pretty, low, irregular cottage at one end ; a large granary, divided from the dwelling by a little court running along one side ; and a long thatched shed, open towards the garden, and supported by wooden pillars, on the other. The bottom is bounded half by an old wall and half by an old paling, over which we see a pretty distance of woody hills. The house, granary, wall, and paling, are covered with vines, cherry-trees, roses, honeysuckles, and jessamines, with great clusters of tall hollyhocks running up between them ; a large elder overhanging the little gate, and a magnificent bay-tree, such a tree as shall scarcely be matched in these parts, breaking with its beautiful conical form the horizontal lines of the buildings. This is my garden ; and the long pillared shed, the

sort of rustic arcade, which runs along one side, parted from the flower-beds by a row of geraniums, is our out-of-door drawing-room.

I know nothing so pleasant as to sit there on a summer afternoon, with the western sun flickering through the great elder-tree, and lighting up our gay parterres, where flowers and flowering shrubs are set as thick as grass in a field, a wilderness of blossom, interwoven, intertwined, wreathy, garlandy, profuse beyond all profusion, where we may guess that there is such a thing as mould, but never see it. I know nothing so pleasant as to sit in the shade of that dark bower, with the eye resting on that bright piece of colour, lighted so gloriously by the evening sun, now catching a glimpse of the little birds as they fly rapidly in and out of their nests—for there are always two or three birds'-nests in the thick tapestry of cherry-trees, honeysuckles, and china-roses, which covers our walls—now tracing the gay gambols of the common butterflies as they sport around the dahlias; now watching that rarer moth, which the country people, fertile in pretty names, call the bee-bird;* that bird-like insect, which flutters in the hottest days over the sweetest flowers, inserting its long proboscis into the small tube of the jessamine, and hovering over the scarlet blossom of the geranium, whose bright colour seems reflected on its own feathery breast: that insect which seems so thoroughly a creature of the air, never at rest; always, even when feeding, self-poised and self-supported, and whose wings, in their ceaseless motion, have a sound so deep, so full, so lulling, so musical. Nothing so pleasant as to sit amid that mixture

* Sphinx ligustri, privet hawk-moth.

of rich flowers and leaves, watching the bee-bird! Nothing so pretty to look at as my garden! It is quite a picture; only unluckily it resembles a picture in more qualities than one—it is fit for nothing but to look at. One might as well think of walking in a bit of framed canvas. There are walks, to be sure—tiny paths of smooth gravel, by courtesy called such—but they as so overhung by roses and lilies, and such gay encroachers—so overrun by convolvulus, and heart's-ease, and mignonette, and other sweet stragglers, that, except to edge through them occasionally for the purpose of planting, or weeding, or watering, there might as well be no paths at all. Nobody thinks of walking in my garden. Even May glides along with a delicate and trackless step, like a swan through the water; and we, its two-footed denizens, are fain to treat it as if it were really a saloon, and go out for a walk towards sunset, just as if we had not been sitting in the open air all day.

What a contrast from the quiet garden to the lively street! Saturday night is always a time of stir and bustle in our village, and this is Whitsun-Eve, the pleasantest Saturday of all the year, when London journeymen and servant lads and lasses snatch a short holiday to visit their families. A short and precious holiday, the happiest and liveliest of any; for even the gambols and merry-makings of Christmas offer but a poor enjoyment compared with the rural diversions, the Mayings, revels, and cricket-matches of Whitsuntide.

We ourselves are to have a cricket-match on Monday, not played by the men, who, since a certain misadventure with the Beech-hillers, are, I am sorry to say, rather chopfallen, but by the boys, who, zealous

for the honour of their parish, and headed by their bold leader Ben Kirby, marched in a body to our antagonists' ground the Sunday after our melancholy defeat, challenged the boys of that proud hamlet, and beat them out and out on the spot. Never was a more signal victory. Our boys enjoyed this triumph with so little moderation that it had like to have produced a very tragical catastrophe. The captain of the Beech-hill youngsters a capital bowler, by name Amos Stone, enraged past all bearing by the crowing of his adversaries, flung the ball at Ben Kirby with so true an aim that if that sagacious leader had not warily ducked his head when he saw it coming, there would probably have been a coroner's inquest on the case, and Amos Stone would have been tried for manslaughter. He let fly with such vengeance, that the cricket-ball was found embedded in a bank of clay five hundred yards off, as if it had been a cannon shot. Tom Coper and Farmer Thackum, the umpires, both say they never saw so tremendous a ball. If Amos Stone live to be a man (I mean to say if he be not hanged first) he'll be a pretty player. He is coming here on Monday with his party to play the return match, the umpires having respectively engaged Farmer Thackum that Amos shall keep the peace, Tom Coper that Ben shall give no unnecessary or wanton provocation—a nicely worded and lawyer-like clause, and one that proves that Tom Coper hath his doubts of the young gentleman's discretion; and, of a truth, so have I. I would not be Ben Kirby's surety, cautiously as the security is worded—no! not for a white double dahlia, the present object of my ambition.

This village of ours is swarming to-night like a hive of bees, and all the church bells round are pouring out their merriest peals, as if to call them together. I must try to give some notion of the various figures.

First, there is a group suited to Teniers, a cluster of out-of-door customers of the Rose, old benchers of the inn, who sit round a table smoking and drinking in high solemnity to the sound of Timothy's fiddle. Next, a mass of eager boys, the combatants of Monday, who are surrounding the shoemaker's shop, where an invisible hole in their ball is mending by Master Keep himself, under the joint superintendence of Ben Kirby and Tom Coper. Ben showing much verbal respect and outward deference for his umpire's judgment and experience, but managing to get the ball done his own way after all; whilst outside the shop, the rest of the eleven, the less trusted commons, are shouting and bawling round Joel Brent, who is twisting the waxed twine round the handles of the bats—the poor bats, which please nobody, which the taller youths are despising as too little and too light, and the smaller are abusing as too heavy and too large. Happy critics! winning their match can hardly be a greater delight —even if to win it they be doomed! Farther down the street is the pretty black-eyed girl, Sally Wheeler, come home for a day's holiday from B., escorted by a tall footman in a dashing livery, whom she is trying to curtsy off before her deaf grandmother sees him. I wonder whether she will succeed!

Ascending the hill are two couples of a different description. Daniel Tubb and his fair Valentine, walking boldly along like licensed lovers; they have

been asked twice in church, and are to be married on Tuesday; and closely following that happy pair, near each other but not together, come Jem Tanner and Mabel Green, the poor culprits of the wheat-hoeing. Ah! the little clerk hath not relented! The course of true love doth not yet run smooth in that quarter. Jem dodges along, whistling "Cherry-ripe," pretending to walk by himself, and to be thinking of nobody; but every now and then he pauses in his negligent saunter, and turns round outright to steal a glance at Mabel, who, on her part, is making believe to walk with poor Olive Hathaway, the lame mantua-maker, and even affecting to talk and to listen to that gentle, humble creature, as she points to the wild flowers on the common, and the lambs and children disporting amongst the gorse, but whose thoughts and eyes are evidently fixed on Jem Tanner, as she meets his backward glance with a blushing smile, and half springs forward to meet him: whilst Olive has broken off the conversation as soon as she perceived the pre-occupation of her companion, and begun humming, perhaps unconsciously, two or three lines of Burns, whose "Whistle and I'll come to ye, my lad," and "Gi'e me a glance of thy bonny black e'e," were never better exemplified than in the couple before her. Really, it is curious to watch them, and to see how gradually the attraction of this tantalising vicinity becomes irresistible, and the rustic lover rushes to his pretty mistress like the needle to the magnet. On they go, trusting to the deepening twilight, to the little clerk's absence, to the good humour of the happy lads and lasses who are passing and repassing on all sides—or

rather, perhaps, in a happy oblivion of the cross uncle, the kind villagers, the squinting lover, and the whole world. On they trip, arm in arm, he trying to catch a glimpse of her glowing face under her bonnet, and she hanging down her head, and avoiding his gaze with a mixture of modesty and coquetry, which well becomes the rural beauty. On they go, with a reality and intensity of affection which must overcome all obstacles; and poor Olive follows her with an evident sympathy in their happiness which makes her almost as enviable as they; and we pursue our walk amidst the moonshine and the nightingales, with Jacob Frost's cart looming in the distance, and the merry sounds of Whitsuntide, the shout, the laugh, and the song, echoing all around us, like "noises of the air."

OUR MAYING.

AS party produces party and festival brings forth festival in higher life, so one scene of rural festivity is pretty sure to be followed by another. The boys' cricket-match at Whitsuntide, which was won most triumphantly by our parish, and luckily passed off without giving cause for a coroner's inquest, or indeed without injury of any sort, except the demolition of Amos Stone's new straw hat, the crown of which (Amos's head being fortunately at a distance) was fairly struck out by the cricket-ball; this match produced one between our eleven and the players of the neighbouring hamlet of Whitley; and being patronised by the young lord of the manor and several of the gentry round, and followed by jumping in sacks, riding donkey-races, grinning through horse-collars, and other diversions more renowned for their antiquity than their elegance, gave such general satisfaction, that it was resolved to hold a Maying in full form in Whitley-wood.

Now this wood of ours happens to be a common of twenty acres, with three trees on it, and the Maying was fixed to be held between hay-time and harvest; but "what's in a name?" Whitley-wood is a beautiful piece of greensward, surrounded on three sides by

fields, and farm-houses, and cottages, and woody uplands, and on the other by a fine park; and the May-house was erected and the May-games held in the beginning of July, the very season of leaves and roses, when the days are at the longest, and the weather at the finest, and the whole world is longing to get out of doors. Moreover, the whole festival was aided, not impeded, by the gentlemen amateurs, headed by that very genial person, our young lord of the manor; whilst the business part of the affair was confided to the well-known diligence, zeal, activity, and intelligence of that most popular of village landlords, mine host of the Rose. How could a Maying fail under such auspices? Everybody expected more sunshine and more fun, more flowers and more laughing, than ever was known at a rustic merrymaking—and really, considering the manner in which expectation had been raised, the quantity of disappointment has been astonishingly small.

Landlord Sims, the master of the revels, and our very good neighbour, is a portly, bustling man of five-and-forty, or thereabout, with a hale, jovial visage, a merry eye, a pleasant smile, and a general air of good-fellowship. This last qualification, whilst it serves greatly to recommend his ale, is apt to mislead superficial observers, who generally account him a sort of a slenderer Boniface, and imagine that, like the renowned hero of the spigot, Master Sims eats, drinks, and sleeps on his own anno domini. They were never more mistaken in their lives; no soberer man than Master Sims within twenty miles! Except for the good of the house, he no more thinks of drinking beer than a grocer of eating figs. To be sure when the jug lags he will take a hearty pull, just

by way of example, and to set the good ale agoing. But, in general, he trusts to subtler and more delicate modes of quickening its circulation. A good song, a good story, a merry jest, a hearty laugh, and a most winning habit of assentation; these are his implements. There is not a better companion, or a more judicious listener, in the county. His pliability is astonishing. He shall say yes to twenty different opinions on the same subject within the hour; and so honest and cordial does his agreement seem, that no one of his customers, whether drunk or sober, ever dreams of doubting his sincerity. The hottest conflict of politics never puzzles him: Whig or Tory, he is both or either—"the happy Mercutio, that curses both houses." Add to this gift of conformity, a cheerful, easy temper, an alacrity of attention, a zealous desire to please, which gives to his duties, as a landlord, all the grace of hospitality, and a perpetual civility and kindness, even when he has nothing to gain by them; and no one can wonder at Master Sims's popularity.

After his good wife's death this popularity began to extend itself in a remarkable manner amongst the females of the neighbourhood: smitten with his portly person, his smooth, oily manner, and a certain soft, earnest, whispering voice, which he generally assumes when addressing one of the fairer sex, and which seems to make his very "How d'ye do" confidential and complimentary. Moreover, it was thought that the good landlord was well to do in the world, and though Betsy and Letty were good little girls, quick, civil, and active, yet, poor things, what could such young girls know of a house like the Rose? All would go to rack and ruin without

the eye of a mistress! Master Sims must look out for a wife. So thought the whole female world, and, apparently, Master Sims began to think so himself.

The first fair one to whom his attention was directed was a rosy, pretty widow, a pastry-cook of the next town, who arrived in our village on a visit to her cousin, the baker, for the purpose of giving confectionery lessons to his wife. Nothing was ever so hot as that courtship. During the week that the lady of pie-crust stayed, her lover almost lived in the oven. One would have thought that he was learning to make the cream tarts without pepper, by which Bedridden Hassan regained his state and his princess. It would be a most suitable match, as all the parish agreed; the widow, for as pretty as she was (and one shan't often see a pleasanter open countenance, or a sweeter smile), being within ten years as old as her suitor, and having had two husbands already. A most proper and suitable match, said everybody; and when our landlord carried her back to B. in his new-painted green cart, all the village agreed that they were gone to be married, and the ringers were just setting up a peal, when Master Sims returned alone, single, crest-fallen, dejected; the bells stopped of themselves, and we heard no more of the pretty pastry-cook. For three months after that rebuff, mine host, albeit not addicted to aversions, testified an equal dislike to women and tartlets, widows and plum-cake. Even poor Alice Taylor, whose travelling basket of lollypops and ginger-bread he had whilom patronised, was forbidden the house; and not a bun or a biscuit could be had at the Rose for love or money.

The fit, however, wore off in time; and he began

again to follow the advice of his neighbours, and to look out for a wife, up street and down; whilst at each extremity a fair object presented herself, from neither of whom had he the slightest reason to dread a repetition of the repulse which he had experienced from the blooming widow. The down-street lady was a widow also, the portly, comely relict of our drunken village blacksmith, who, in spite of her joy at her first husband's death, and an old spite at mine host of the Rose, to whose good ale and good company she was wont to ascribe most of the aberrations of the deceased, began to find her shop, her journeymen, and her eight children (six unruly, obstreperous Pickles of boys, and two tom-boys of girls) rather more than a lone woman could manage, and to sigh for a helpmate to ease her of her cares, collect the boys at night, see the girls to school of a morning, break the larger imps off running away to revels and fairs, and the smaller fry off birds'-nesting and orchard-robbing, and bear a part in the lectures and chastisements which she deemed necessary to preserve the young rebels from the bad end which she predicted to them twenty times a-day. Master Sims was the coadjutor on whom she had inwardly pitched; and, accordingly, she threw out broad hints to that effect every time she encountered him, which, in the course of her search for boys and girls who were sure to be missing at school-time and bed-time, happened pretty often; and Mr. Sims was far too gallant and too much in the habit of assenting to listen unmoved; for really the widow was a fine, tall, comely woman; and the whispers, and smiles, and hand-pressings when they happened to meet were becoming

very tender; and his admonitions and head-shakings addressed to the young crew (who, nevertheless, all liked him) quite fatherly. This was his down-street flame.

The rival lady was Miss Lydia Day, the carpenter's sister; a slim upright maiden, not remarkable for beauty, and not so young as she had been, who, on inheriting a small annuity from the mistress with whom she had spent the best of her days, retired to her native village to live on her means. A genteel, demure, quiet personage was Miss Lydia Day; much addicted to snuff and green tea, and not averse from a little gentle scandal—for the rest, a good sort of woman, and *un très-bon parti* for Master Sims, who seemed to consider it a profitable speculation, and made love to her whenever she happened to come into his head, which, it must be confessed, was hardly so often as her merits and her annuity deserved. Remiss as he was, he had no lack of encouragement to complain of—for she "to hear would seriously incline," and put on her best silk, and her best simper, and lighted up her faded complexion into something approaching to a blush whenever he came to visit her. And this was Master Sims's up-street love.

So stood affairs at the Rose when the day of the Maying arrived; and the double flirtation, which, however dexterously managed, must have been sometimes, one would think, rather inconvenient to the inamorato, proved on this occasion extremely useful. Each of the fair ladies contributed her aid to the festival; Miss Lydia by tying up sentimental garlands for the May-house, and scolding the carpenters into diligence in the erection of the booths; the widow by giving her whole bevy of boys and girls a

holiday, and turning them loose on the neighbourhood to collect flowers as they could. Very useful auxiliaries were these light foragers; they scoured the country far and near—irresistible mendicants! pardonable thieves! coming to no harm, poor children, except that little George got a black eye in tumbling from the top of an acacia tree at the Park, and that Sam (he's a sad Pickle is Sam!) narrowly escaped a horse-whipping from the head gardener at the Hall, who detected a bunch of his new rhododendron, the only plant in the county, forming the very crown and centre of the May-pole. Little harm did they do, poor children, with all their pilfery; and when they returned, covered with their flowery loads, like the May-day figure called "Jack of the Green," they worked at the garlands and the May-houses as none but children ever do work, putting all their young life and their untiring spirit of noise and motion into their pleasant labour. Oh, the din of that building! Talk of the Tower of Babel! that was a quiet piece of masonry compared to the May-house of Whitley Wood, with its walls of leaves and flowers—and its canvas booths at either end for refreshments and musicians. Never was known more joyous note of preparation.

The morning rose more quietly—I had almost said more dully—and promised ill for the *fête*. The sky was gloomy, the wind cold, and the green filled as slowly as a balloon seems to do when one is watching it. The entertainments of the day were to begin with a cricket-match (two elevens to be chosen on the ground), and the wickets pitched at twelve o'clock precisely. Twelve o'clock came—but no cricketers—except, indeed, some two or three punctual and

impatient gentlemen: one o'clock came and brought no other reinforcement than two or three more of our young Etonians and Wykhamites—less punctual than their precursors, but not a whit less impatient. Very provoking, certainly—but not very uncommon. Your country cricketer, the peasant, the mere rustic, does love, on these occasions, to keep his betters waiting, if only to display his power; and when we consider that it is the one solitary opportunity in which importance can be felt and vanity gratified, we must acknowledge it to be perfectly in human nature that a few airs should be shown. Accordingly, our best players held aloof. Tom Coper would not come to the ground; Joel Brent came indeed, but would not play; Samuel Long coquetted—he would and he would not. Very provoking, certainly! Then two young farmers, a tall brother and a short, Hampshire men, cricketers born, whose good-humour and love of the game rendered them sure cards, had been compelled to go on business—the one ten miles south—the other, fifteen north—that very morning. No playing without the Goddards! No sign of either of them on the B—— road or the F——. Most intolerably provoking, beyond a doubt. Master Sims tried his best coaxing and his best double X on the recusant players; but all in vain. In short, there was great danger of the match going off altogether; when, about two o'clock, Amos Stone, who was there with the crown of his straw hat sewed in wrong side outwards—new thatched, as it were—and who had been set to watch the B—— highway, gave notice that something was coming as tall as a Maypole—which something turning out to be the long Goddard, and his brother approaching at the same moment in

the opposite direction, hope, gaiety, and good-humour revived again; and two elevens, including Amos and another urchin of his calibre, were formed on the spot.

I never saw a prettier match. The gentlemen, the Goddards, and the boys being equally divided, the strength and luck of the parties were so well balanced that it produced quite a neck-and-neck race, won only by two notches. Amos was completely the hero of the day, standing out half of his side, and getting five notches at one hit. His side lost—but so many of his opponents gave him their ribbands (have not I said that Master Sims bestowed a set of ribbands?) that the straw hat was quite covered with purple trophies; and Amos, stalking about the ground with a shy and awkward vanity, looked with his decorations like the sole conqueror—the Alexander or Napoleon of the day. The boy did not speak a word; but every now and then he displayed a set of huge white teeth in a grin of inexpressible delight. By far the happiest and proudest personage of that Maying was Amos Stone.

By the time the cricket-match was over the world began to be gay at Whitley Wood. Carts and gigs, and horses and carriages, and people of all sorts arrived from all quarters; and, lastly, "the blessed sun himself" made his appearance, adding a triple lustre to the scene. Fiddlers, ballad-singers, cake baskets—Punch—Master Frost, crying cherries—a Frenchman with dancing dogs—a Bavarian woman selling brooms—half-a-dozen stalls with fruit and frippery—and twenty noisy games of quoits, and bowls, and ninepins—boys throwing at boxes—girls playing at ball—gave to the assemblage the bustle,

clatter, and gaiety of a Dutch fair, as one sees it in Teniers' pictures. Plenty of drinking and smoking on the green—plenty of eating in the booths: the gentlemen cricketers, at one end, dining off a round of beef which made the table totter—the players, at the other, supping off a gammon of bacon—Amos Stone crammed at both—and Landlord Sims bustling everywhere with an activity that seemed to confer upon him the gift of ubiquity, assisted by the little light-footed maidens, his daughters, all smiles and curtsies, and by a pretty black-eyed young woman —name unknown—with whom, even in the midst of his hurry, he found time, as it seemed to me, for a little philandering. What would the widow and Miss Lydia have said? But they remained in happy ignorance—the one drinking tea in most decorous primness in a distant marquee, disliking to mingle with so mixed an assembly—the other in full chase after the most unlucky of all her urchins, the boy called Sam, who had gotten into a *démêlé* with a showman, in consequence of mimicking the wooden gentleman Punch and his wife Judy—thus, as the showman observed, bringing his exhibition into disrepute.

Meanwhile, the band struck up in the May-house, and the dance, after a little demur, was fairly set afloat —an honest English country-dance—(there had been some danger of waltzing and quadrilling)—with ladies and gentlemen at the top, and country lads and lasses at the bottom; a happy mixture of cordial kindness on the one hand, and pleased respect on the other. It was droll, though, to see the beplumed and beflowered French hats, the silks and the fur-belows, sailing and rustling amidst the straw bonnets and cotton gowns

of the humbler dancers ; and not less so to catch a glimpse of the little lame clerk, shabbier than ever, peeping through the canvas opening of the booth, with a grin of ineffable delight, over the shoulders of our vicar's pretty wife. Really, considering that Mabel Green and Jem Tanner were standing together at that moment at the top of the set, so deeply engaged in making love that they forgot when they ought to begin, and that the little clerk must have seen them, I cannot help taking his grin as a favourable omen to those faithful lovers.

Well, the dance finished, the sun went down, and we departed. The Maying is over, the booths carried away, and the May-house demolished. Everything has fallen into its old position except the love affairs of Landlord Sims. The pretty lass, with the black eyes, who first made her appearance at Whitley Wood, is actually staying at the Rose Inn, on a visit to his daughters ; and the village talk goes that she is to be the mistress of that thriving hostelry, and the wife of its master ; and both her rivals are jealous after their several fashions—the widow in her tantrums, the maiden in the dumps. Nobody knows exactly who the black-eyed damsel may be—but she's young, and pretty, and civil, and modest ; and without intending to depreciate the merits of either of her competitors, I cannot help thinking that our neighbour has shown his good taste.

A CASTLE IN THE AIR.

"CAN any one tell me of a house to be let hereabouts?" asked I, this afternoon, coming into the room, with an open letter in my hand, and an unusual animation of feeling and of manner. "Our friends, the Camdens, want to live amongst us again, and have commissioned me to make inquiries for a residence."

This announcement, as I expected, gave general delight; for Mr. Camden is the most excellent and most agreeable person under the sun, except his wife, who is even more amiable than her amiable husband: to regain such neighbours was felt to be an universal benefit, more especially to us who were so happy as to call them friends. My own interest in the house question was participated by all around me, and the usual enumeration of vacant mansions, and the several objections to each (for where ever was a vacant mansion without its objection!) began with zeal and rapidity.

"Cranley Hall," said one.

"Too large."

"Hinton Park?"

"Too much land."

"The White House at Hannonby—the Belvidere, as the late people called it?"

"What! Is that flourishing establishment done up? But Hannonby is too far off—ten miles at least."

"Queen's-bridge Cottage?"

"Ay, that sweet place would have suited exactly, but it's let. The Browns took it only yesterday."

"Sydenham Court?"

"That might have done too, but it is not in the market. The Smiths intend to stay."

"Lanton Abbey?"

"Too low; grievously damp."

By this time, however, we had arrived at the end of our list; nobody could remember another place to be let, or likely to be let, and confessing ourselves too fastidious, we went again over our catalogue *raisonné* with expectations much sobered, and objections much modified, and were beginning to find out that Cranley Hall was not so very large, nor Lanton Abbey so exceedingly damp, when one of our party exclaimed suddenly, "We never thought of Hatherden Hill! surely that is small enough and dry enough!" and it being immediately recollected that Hatherden was only a mile off, we lost sight of all faults in this great recommendation, and wrote immediately to the lawyer who had the charge of letting the place, whilst I myself and my most efficient assistant sallied forth to survey it on the instant.

It was a bright cool afternoon about the middle of August, and we proceeded in high spirits towards our destination, talking, as we went, of the excellence and agreeableness of our delightful friends, and anticipating the high intellectual pleasure, the gratification to the taste and the affections which our renewed intercourse with persons so accomplished

and so amiable could not fail to afford; both agreeing that Hatherden was the very place we wanted, the very situation, the very distance, the very size. In agreeing with me, however, my companion could not help reminding me rather maliciously how very much, in our late worthy neighbours', the Norrises, time, I had been used to hate and shun this paragon of places; how frequently I had declared Hatherden too distant for a walk, and too near for a drive; how constantly I had complained of fatigue in mounting the hill, and of cold in crossing the common; and how, finally, my half-yearly visits of civility had dwindled first into annual, then into biennial calls, and would doubtless have extended themselves into triennial marks of remembrance, if our neighbours had but remained long enough. "To be sure," added he, recollecting, probably, how he, with his stricter sense of politeness, used to stave off a call for a month together, taking shame to himself every evening for his neglect, retaining "at once the conscience and the sin!" "To be sure, Norris was a sad bore! We shall find the hill easier to climb when the Camdens live on the top of it." An observation to which I assented most heartily.

On we went gaily; just pausing to admire Master Keep, the shoemaker's farming, who, having a bit of garden-ground to spare, sowed it with wheat instead of planting it with potatoes, and is now, aided by his lame apprentice, very literally carrying his crop. I fancy they mean to thresh their corn in the woodhouse, at least there they are depositing the sheaves. The produce may amount to four bushels. My companion, a better judge, says to

three; and it has cost the new farmer two superb scarecrows, and gunpowder enough for a review, to keep off the sparrows. Well, it has been amusement and variety, however! and gives him an interest in the agricultural corner of the county newspaper. Master Keep is well-to-do in the world, and can afford himself such a diversion. For my part, I like these little experiments, even if they be not over gainful. They show enterprise: a shoemaker of less genius would never have got beyond a crop of turnips.

On we went—down the lane, over the bridge, up the hill—for there really is a hill, and one of some steepness for Berkshire, and across the common, once so dreary, but now bright and glittering under the double influence of an August sun and our own good spirits, until we were stopped by the gate of the lawn, which was of course locked, and obliged to wait until a boy should summon the old woman who had charge of the house, and who was now at work in a neighbouring harvest-field, to give us entrance.

Boys in plenty were there. The fine black-headed lad George Ropley, who, with his olive complexion, his bright dark eyes, and his keen intelligent features, looks so Italian, but who is yet in all his ways so thoroughly and genially English—had been gathering in his father's crop of apples, and was amusing himself with tossing some twenty amongst as many urchins of either sex who had collected round him to partake of the fruit and the sport. There he stood tossing the ripe ruddy apples; some high in the air for a catch, some low amongst the bushes for a hunt; some one way, some another, puzzling and perplexing

the rogues, by taking care that none should go appleless in the midst of his fun. And what fun it was to them all, thrower and catchers! What infinite delight! How they laughed and shouted, and tumbled and ran! How they watched every motion of George Ropley's hand; the boys and the girls, and the "toddling wee things," of whom one could not distinctly make out whether they were the one or the other! And how often was that hand tossed up empty, flinging nothing, in order to cheat the wary watchers! Now he threw an apple into the midst of the group, and what a scramble! Then at a distance, and what a race! The five nearest started; one, a great boy, stumbled over a mole-hill and was flung out; two of the little ones were distanced; and it was a neck and neck heat between a girl in a pink frock (my acquaintance, Liddy Wheeler) and a boy in a tattered jacket, name unknown. With fair play Liddy would have beaten, but he of the ragged jacket pulled her back by her new pink frock, rushed forward, and conquered—George gallantly flinging his last apple into her lap to console her for her defeat.

By this time the aged portress (Dame Wheeler, Liddy's grandmother) had given us admittance, and we stood on the steps in front of the house, in calm survey of the scene before us. Hatherden was just the place to like or not to like, according to the feeling of the hour; a respectable, comfortable country house, with a lawn before, a paddock on one side, a shrubbery on the other; offices and a kitchen garden behind, and the usual ornaments of villas and advertisements, a green-house and a veranda. Now, my thoughts were *couleur de rose*,

and Hatherden was charming. Even the beds intended for flowers on the lawn, but which, under a summer's neglect, were now dismal receptacles of seeds and weeds, did not shock my gardening eye so much as my companion evidently expected. "We must get my factotum, Clarke, here to-morrow," so ran my thoughts, "to clear away that rubbish, and try a little bold transplanting: late holly-hocks, late dahlias, a few pots of lobelias and chrysanthemums, a few patches of coreopsis and china-asters, and plenty of scarlet geraniums, will soon make this desolation flourishing. A good gardener can move anything now-a-days, whether in bloom or not," thought I, with much complacency; "and Clarke's a man to transplant Windsor forest without withering a leaf. We'll have him to-morrow."

The same happy disposition continued after I entered the house. And when left alone in the echoing empty breakfast-room, with only one shutter opened, while Dame Wheeler was guiding the companion of my survey to the stable-yard, I amused myself with making, in my own mind, comparisons between what had been, and what would be. There she used to sit, poor Mrs. Norris, in this large airy room, in the midst of its solid handsome furniture, in a great chair at a great table, busily at work for one of her seven small children; the table piled with frocks, trousers, petticoats, shirts, pinafores, hats, bonnets, all sorts of children's gear, masculine and feminine, together with spelling-books, copy-books, ivory alphabets, dissected maps, dolls, toys, and ginger-bread for the same small people. There she sat, a careful mother, fretting over their naughtiness and their ailments; always in fear of the sun, or

the wind, or the rain, of their running to heat themselves, or their standing still to catch cold: not a book in the house fit for a person turned of eight years old! not a grown-up idea! not a thought beyond the nursery! One wondered what she could have talked of before she had children. Good Mrs. Norris, such was she. Good Mr. Norris was, for all purposes of neighbourhood, worse still. He was gapy and fidgety, and prosy and dozy, kept a tool-chest and a medicine-chest, weighed out manna and magnesia, constructed fishing-flies and nets for fruit trees, turned nutmeg-graters, lined his wife's work-box, and dressed his little daughter's doll; and had a tone of conversation perfectly in keeping with his tastes and pursuits, abundantly tedious, thin, and small. One talked down to him, worthy gentleman, as one would to his son Willy. These were the neighbours that had been. What wonder that the hill was steep, and the way long, and the common dreary! Then came pleasant thoughts of the neighbours that were to be. The lovely and accomplished wife, so sweet and womanly; the elegant and highly-informed husband, so spirited and manly! Art and literature, and wisdom and wit adorning with a wreathy and garlandy splendour all that is noblest in mind and purest in heart! What wonder that Hatherden became more and more interesting in its anticipated charms, and that I went gaily about the place, taking note of all that could contribute to the comfort of its future inhabitants!

Home I came, a glad and busy creature, revolving in my mind the wants of the house and their speediest remedies—new paper for the drawing-room; new wainscoting for the dining parlour · a stove for

the laundry ; a lock for the wine cellar ; baizing the door of the library, and new painting the hall ; to say nothing of the grand design of Clarke and the flower-beds.

So full was I of busy thoughts, and so desirous to put my plans in train without the loss of a moment, that although the tossing of apples had now resolved itself into a most irregular game of cricket, George Ropley being batting at one wicket, with little Sam Coper for his mate at the other ; Sam, an urchin of seven years old, but the son of an old player, full of cricket blood, born, as it were, with the bat in his hand, getting double the notches of his tall partner—an indignity which that well-natured stripling bore with surprising good humour ; and although the opposite side consisted of Liddy Wheeler bowling at one end, her old competitor of the ragged jacket at the other, and one urchin in trousers, and one in petticoats, standing out ; in spite of the temptation of watching this comical parody on that manly exercise, rendered doubly amusing by the scientific manner in which little Sam stood at his wicket, the perfect gravity of the fieldsman in petticoats, and the serious air with which these two worthies called Liddy to order whenever she transgressed any rule of the game—Sam will certainly be a great player some day or other, and so (if he be not a girl, for really there's no telling) will the young gentleman standing out—in spite, however, of the great temptation of overlooking a favourite divertisement, with variations so truly original, home we went, hardly pausing to observe the housing of Mr. Keep's wheat harvest. Home we went, adding at every step a fresh storey to our Castle in the Air, anticipating happy mornings

and joyous evenings at dear Hatherden; in love with the place and all about it, and quite convinced that the hill was nothing, the distance nothing, and the walk by far the prettiest in this neighbourhood.

Home we came, and there we found two letters, one from Mr. Camden, sent per coach, to say he found that they must go abroad immediately, and that they, therefore, could not think of coming into Berkshire for a year or more; one from the lawyer left in charge of Hatherden, to say that we could not have the place, as the Norrisses were returning to their old house forthwith. And my castle is knocked down—blown up—which is the right word for the demolishing of such airy edifices? And Hatherden is as far off, and the hill as steep, and the common as dreary as ever.

ROSEDALE.

I DON'T know how it happened, when we were house-hunting the other day, that nobody ever thought of Rosedale. I should have objected to it, both as out of distance—it's a good six miles off; and has been utterly unrecommendable by one rational person to another. Rosedale! the very name smacks of the Minerva Press, and gives token of the nonsense and trumpery thereunto belonging. Rosedale Cottage! the man who, under that portentous title, takes that house, cannot complain of lack of warning.

Nevertheless is Rosedale one of the prettiest cottages that ever sprung into existence in brick or on paper. All strangers go to see it, and few "cots of spruce gentility" are so well worth seeing. Fancy a low, irregular, white, rough-cast building, thatched with reeds, covered with roses, clematis, and passion-flowers, standing on a knoll of fine turf, amidst flower-beds and shrubberies and magnificent elms, backed by an abrupt hill, and looking over lawny fields to a green common, which is intersected by a gay high road, dappled with ponds of water, and terminated by a pretty village edging off into rich woodlands: imagine this picture of a place tricked out with ornaments of all sorts, conservatories,

roseries, rustic seats, American borders, Gothic dairies, Spanish hermitages, and flowers stuck as close as pins in a pincushion, with everything, in short, that might best become the walls of an exhibition room, or the back scene of a play; conceive the interior adorned in a style of elegance still more fanciful, and it will hardly appear surprising that this "unique bijou," as the advertisement calls it, should seldom want a tenant. The rapid succession of these occupiers is the more extraordinary matter. Everybody is willing to come to Rosedale, but nobody stays.

For this, however, it is not difficult to assign very sufficient cause. In the first place, the house has the original sin of most ornamented cottages, that of being built on the foundation of a real labourer's dwelling, by which notable piece of economy the owner saved some thirty pounds, at the expense of making half his rooms mere nutshells, and the house incurably damp, to say nothing of the inconvenience of the many apartments which were erected as afterthoughts, the addenda of the work, and are only to be come at by outside passages and French window-doors. Secondly, that necessary part of a two-storey mansion, the staircase, was utterly forgotten by architect, proprietor, and builder, and never missed by any person till the ladder being one day taken away at the dinner hour, an Irish labourer, accidently left behind, was discovered by the workmen on their return perched like a bird on the top of the roof, he having taken the method of going up the chimney as the quickest way of getting down. This adventure occasioned a call for the staircase, which was at length inserted by-the-by, and is as much like a

step-ladder in a dark corner as anything well can be.* Thirdly and lastly, this beautiful abode is in every way most thoroughly inconvenient and uncomfortable. In the winter one might find as much protection in the hollow of a tree—cold, gusty, sleety, wet; snow threatening from above like an avalanche; water gushing up from below like a fountain; a house of card-paper would be the solider refuge, a gipsy's tent by far the more snug. In summer it is proportionately close and hot, giving little shade and no shelter; and all the year round it is overdone with frippery and finery, a toy-shop in action, a Brobdignagian baby-house.

Every room is in masquerade: the saloon Chinese, full of jars, and mandarins, and pagodas; the library Egyptian, all covered with hieroglyphics, and swarming with furniture crocodiles and sphynxes. Only think of a crocodile couch, and a sphynx sofa! They sleep in Turkish tents, and dine in a Gothic chapel.† Now, English ladies and gentlemen, in their every day apparel, look exceedingly out of place amongst such mummery. The costume won't do. It is not in keeping. Besides, the properties themselves are apt to get shifted from one scene to another, and all

* This instance of forgetfulness is not unexampled. A similar accident is said to have happened to Madam d'Arblay in the erection of a cottage built from the profits of her admirable *Camilla.*

† Some of the pleasantest days of my life have been spent in a house so furnished. But then it was of fitting dimensions, and the delightful persons to whom it belonged had a house in London and a mansion in the country, and used their fancy villa much as one would use a marquee or a pleasure-boat, for gay parties in fine weather. Rosedale, unlucky place, was built to be lived in.

manner of anomalies are the consequence. The mitred chairs and screens of the chapel, for instance, so very upright and tall, and carved and priestly, were mixed up oddly enough with the squat Chinese bronzes; whilst by some strange transposition a pair of nodding mandarins figured amongst the Egyptian monsters, and by the aid of their supernatural ugliness really looked human.

Then the room taken up by the various knick-nackery, the unnamed and unnameable generation of gew-gaws! It always seemed to me to require more housemaids than the house would hold. And the same with the garden. You are so begirt with garlands and festoons, flowers above and flowers below, that you walk about under a perpetual sense of trespass, of taking care of doing mischief, now bobbing against a sweet-brier, in which rencontre you have the worst; now flapped in the face by a woodbine, to the discomfiture of both parties; now revenging these vegetable wrongs by tripping up an unfortunate balsam; bonnets, coatskirts, and flounces in equal peril! The very gardeners step gingerly, and tuck their aprons tightly round them before they venture into that fair demesne of theirs, which is, so to say, over-peopled. In short, Rosedale is a place to look at rather than live in; a fact which will be received without dispute by some score of tenants, by the proprietor of a county newspaper, who keeps the advertisement of this matchless villa constantly set, to his no small emolument, and by the neighbourhood at large, to whom the succession of new faces, new liveries, new equipages driving about our rustic lanes, and sometimes occupying a very tasty pew in the parish church, has long

supplied a source of conversation as unfailing and as various as the weather.

The first person who ascertained, by painful experience, that Rosedale was uninhabitable, was the proprietor, a simple young man from the next town, who unluckily took it into his head that he had a taste for architecture and landscape gardening, and so forth; and falling into the hands of a London upholsterer and a country nurseryman, produced the effort of genius that I have endeavoured to describe. At the end of a month he found that nobody could live there; and, with the advice of the nurseryman and the upholsterer, began to talk of rebuilding and new modelling; nay, he actually went so far as to send for the bricklayer; but, fortunately for our man of taste, he had a wife of more sense than himself, who seized the moment of disappointment to disgust him with improvements and improvers, in which feat she was greatly aided by the bills of his late associates; put a stop at once to his projects and his complaints; removed with all speed to their old residence, an ugly, roomy, comfortable red-brick house in the market-place at B.; drew up a flaming advertisement, and turned the grumbling occupant into a thriving landlord. Lucky for him was the day in which William Walker, Esquire, married Miss Bridget Tomkins, second daughter of Mr. Samuel Tomkins, attorney-at-law! And lucky for Mr. Samuel Tomkins was the hour in which he acquired a son-in-law more profitable in the article of leases than the two lords to whom he acted as steward both put together.

First on the list of tenants was a bride and bridegroom, come to spend the early months of their

nuptial life in this sweet retirement. They arrived towards the end of August with a great retinue of servants, horses, dogs, and carriages, well-bedecked with bridal favours. The very pointers had white ribands round their necks, so splendid was their rejoicing, and had each, as we were credibly informed, eaten a huge slice of wedding-cake when the happy couple returned from church. The bride, whom everybody except myself called plain, and whom I thought pretty, had been a great heiress, and had married for love the day she came of age. She was slight of form and pale of complexion, with a profusion of brown hair, mild hazel eyes, a sweet smile, a soft voice, and an air of modesty that clung about her like a veil. I never saw a more lovable creature. He was dark, and tall, and stout, and bold, with an assured, yet gentlemanly air, a loud voice, a confident manner, and a real passion for shooting. They stayed just a fortnight, during which time he contrived to get warned off half the manors in the neighbourhood, and cut down the finest elm on the lawn one wet morning to open a view of the high road. I hope the marriage has turned out a happy one, for she was a sweet, gentle creature. I used to see her leaning over the gate watching his return from shooting with such a fond patience! And her bound to meet him when he did appear! And the pretty coaxing playfulness with which she patted and chided her rivals, the dogs! Oh, I hope she is happy! but I fear, I fear.

Next succeeded a couple from India, before whom floated reports golden and gorgeous as the clouds at sunset. Inexhaustible riches; profuse expenditure; tremendous ostentation; unheard of luxury!

ortolans; becaficos; French beans at Christmas; green peas at Easter; strawberries always; a chariot and six; twelve black footmen; and parrots and monkeys beyond all count. These were amongst the most moderate of the rumours that preceded them; and every idle person in the country was preparing to be a hanger-on; and every shopkeeper in B. on the watch for a customer; when up drove a quiet-looking old gentleman in a pony-chaise, with a quiet-looking old lady at his side, and took possession, their retinue following in a hack post-chaise. Whether the habits of this Eastern Crœsus corresponded with his modest *début* or his magnificent reputation we had not time to discover, although, from certain indications, I conceive that much might be said on both sides. They arrived in the middle of a fine October, while the China-roses covered the walls, and the China-asters, and dahlias, and fuchsias, and geraniums in full blow gave a summer brilliancy to the lawn; but scarcely had a pair of superb Common Prayer Books, bound in velvet, and a Bible with gold clasps, entered in possession of the pew at church, before "there came a frost, a nipping frost," which turned the China-asters and the China-roses brown, and the dahlias and geraniums black, and the nabob and the nabobess blue. They disappeared the next day, and have never been seen or heard of since.

Then arrived a fox-hunting baronet, with a splendid stud and a splendid fortune. A young man, a single man, a handsome man! Every speculating mamma in the country fixed her eyes on Sir Robert for a son-in-law; papas were sent to call; brothers were enjoined to go out hunting, and get acquainted;

nay, even certain of the young ladies themselves (I grieve to say it!) showed symptoms of condescension which might almost have made their grandmothers start from their graves. But what could they do? How could they help it, poor pretty things? The baronet, with the instinct of a determined bachelor, avoided a young lady as a sparrow does a hawk, and discovering this shyness, they followed their instinct as the hawk would do in a similar case, and pursued the coy bird. It was what sportsmen call a fine open season, which, being translated, means every variety of wintry weather except frost—dirty, foggy, sleety, wet; so such of our belles as looked well on horseback took the opportunity to ride to cover and see the hounds throw off; and such as shone more as pedestrians would take an early walk, exquisitely dressed, for their health's sake, towards the general rendezvous. Still Sir Robert was immovable. He made no morning calls, accepted no invitations, spoke to no mortal till he had ascertained that there was neither sister, daughter, aunt, nor cousin, in the case. He kept from every petticoat as if it contained the contagion of the plague, shunned ball-rooms and drawing-rooms as if they were pest-houses, and, finally, had the comfort of leaving Rosedale without having even bowed to a female during his stay. The final cause of his departure has been differently reported; some hold that he was frightened away by Miss Amelia Singleton, who had nearly caused him to commit involuntary homicide (is that the word for killing a woman?), by crossing and recrossing before his hunter in Sallow-field lane, thereby putting him in danger of a coroner's inquest; whilst others assert

that his landlord, Mr. Walker, happening to call one day, found his tenant in dirty boots on the sphynx sofa, and a Newfoundland dog, dripping with mud, on the crocodile couch, and gave him notice to quit on the spot. For my part, I regard this legend as altogether apocryphal, invented to save the credit of the house, by assuming that one of its many inhabitants was turned out contrary to his own wish. My faith goes entirely with the Miss Amelia version of the history; the more so as that gentle damsel was so inconsolable as to marry a former beau, a small squire of the neighbourhood, rather weather-beaten, and not quite so young as he had been, within a month after she had the ill-luck not to be run over by Sir Robert.

However that may have been, "thence ensued a vacancy" in Rosedale, which was supplied the same week by a musical family, a travelling band—drums, trumpets, harps, pianos, violins, violoncellos, trombones, and German flutes—noise personified! an incarnation of din! The family consisted of three young ladies, who practised regularly six hours a-day; a governess, who played on some instrument or other from morning till night; one fluting brother; one fiddling ditto; a violoncelloing music-master; and a singing papa. The only quiet person among them, the "one poor halfpenny worth of bread to this monstrous quantity of sack," was the unfortunate mamma, sole listener, as it seemed, of her innumerous choir. Oh, how we pitied her! She was a sweet, placid-looking woman, and younger in appearance than either of her daughters, with a fair open forehead, full dark eyes, lips that seemed waiting to smile, a deep yet cool colour, and a heavenly

composure of countenance, resembling in features, expression, and complexion the small Madonnas of Raphael. We never ceased to wonder at her happy serenity until we found out that the good lady was deaf, a discovery which somewhat diminished the ardour of our admiration. How this enviable calamity befell her I did not hear—but of course that din! The very jars and mandarins cracked under the incessant vibration; I only wonder that the poor house did not break the drum of its ears; did not burst from its own report, and explode like an overloaded gun. One could not see that unlucky habitation half-a-mile off without such a feeling of noise as comes over one in looking at Hogarth's enraged musician. To pass it was really dangerous. One stage-coach was overturned, and two post-chaises ran away, in consequence of their uproarious doings; and a sturdy, old-fashioned country gentleman, who rode a particularly anti-musical, startlish blood-horse, began to talk of indicting Rosedale as a nuisance, when, just at the critical moment, its tenants had the good fortune to discover that although the hermitage, with its vaulted roof, made a capital concert-room, yet that there was not space enough within doors for their several practisings, that the apartments were too small, and the partitions too thin, so that concord was turned into discord, and harmonies went crossing each other all over the house—Mozart jostled by Rossini, and Handel put down by Weber. And away they went also.

Our next neighbours were two ladies, not sisters, except, as one of them said, in soul; kindred spirits determined to retire from the world, and emulate in this sweet retreat the immortal friendship of the

ladies of Llangollen.* The names of our pair of friends were Jackson and Jennings, Miss Laura Jackson, (I wonder whether Laura really was her name! She signed herself so in prose and in verse, and would certainly, for more reasons than one, have disliked an appeal to the Register! besides, she ought to know; so Laura it shall be!) Miss Laura Jackson and Miss Barbara Jennings, commonly called Bab. Both were of that unfortunate class of young ladies whom the malicious world is apt to call old maids; both rich, both independent, and both, in the fullest sense of the word, cockneys. Laura was tall and lean, and scraggy and yellow, dressing in an Arcadian sort of way, pretty much like an opera shepherdess without a crook, singing pastoral songs prodigiously out of tune, and talking in a deep voice, with much emphasis and astounding fluency, all sorts of sentimentalities all the day long. Miss Barbara, on the other hand, was short and plump, and round-faced and ruddy, inclining to vulgarity, as Laura to affectation, with a great love of dancing, a pleasant, chuckling laugh, and a most agreeable habit of assentation. Altogether, Bab was a likable person in spite of some nonsense, which is more than could honestly be said for her companion.

* I need not, I trust, disclaim any intention of casting the slightest shade of ridicule on the remarkable instance of female friendship to which I have alluded in the text. A union enduring as that has done, from youth to age, adorned by rank, talent, and beauty, cemented by cheerfulness and good humour, and consecrated by benevolence and virtue, can fear no one's censure, and soars far beyond my feeble praise. But the heartless imitation, the absurd parody of the noble and elevating romance, is surely fair game, the more so, as it tends, like all parodies, to bring the original into undeserved disrepute.

Juxtaposition laid the corner-stone of this immortal friendship, which had already lasted four months and a-half, and, cemented by resemblance of situation and dissimilarity of character, really bade fair to continue some months longer. Both had been heartily weary of their previous situations —Laura keeping house for a brother in Aldersgate Street, where, as she said, she was overwhelmed by odious vulgar business; Barbara living with an aunt on Fish-street Hill, where she was tired to death of having nothing to do. Both had a passion for the country. Laura, who, except one jaunt to Margate, had never been out of the sound of Bow-bells, that she might ruralise after the fashion of the poets, sit under trees, and gather roses all day long; Bab, who, in spite of yearly trips to Paris, and Brussels, and Amsterdam, and Brighton, had hardly seen a green field except through a coach window, was, on her side, possessed with a mania for notability and management; *she yearned to keep cows*, fatten pigs, breed poultry, grow cabbages, make hay, brew and bake, and wash and churn. Visions of killing her own mutton flitted over her delighted fancy; and when one evening at a ball in the Borough her favourite partner had deserted her to dance with her niece, and Miss Laura, who had been reading Miss Seward's letters, proposed to her to retire from the world and its vanities, in imitation of the illustrious recluses of Llangollen, Miss Barbara, caught above all things with the prospect of making her own butter every morning for breakfast,* acceded to the proposal most joyfully.

The vow of friendship was taken, and nothing

* *Vide* Anna Seward's Correspondence.

remained but to look out for a house. Barbara wanted a farm, Laura a cottage; Barbara talked of cows and clover, Laura of nightingales and violets; Barbara sighed for Yorkshire pastures, Laura for Welsh mountains; and the scheme seemed likely to go off for want of an habitation, when Rosedale in all the glory of advertisement shone on Miss Laura in the *Morning Post*, and was immediately engaged by the delighted friends on a lease of seven, fourteen, or one-and-twenty years.

It was a raw blowy March evening when the fair partners arrived at the cottage. Miss Laura made a speech in her usual style on taking possession—an invocation to friendship and rural nature, and a deprecation of cities, society, and men—at the conclusion of which Miss Barbara underwent an embassade; and having sufficiently admired the wonders within, they sallied forth with a candle and lanthorn to view their ruralities without. Miss Laura was better satisfied with this ramble than her companion. She found at least three trees and primroses, whilst the country felicities of ducks and chickens were entirely wanting. Bab, however, reconciled the matter by supposing they were gone to roost, and a little worn out by the journey, wisely followed their example.

The next day Miss Laura was obliged to infringe her own most sacred and inviolable rule, and admit a man—the apothecary—into this maiden abode. She had sat under a tree the night before listening not to, but for a nightingale, and was laid up by a most unpastoral fit of the rheumatism. Barbara, in the meanwhile, was examining her territory by daylight, and discovering fresh cause of vexation at every step.

Here she was in the country, in a cottage "comprising," as the advertisement set forth, "all manner of convenience and accommodation," without grass or corn, or cow or sheep, or pig or chicken, or turkey or goose; no laundry, no brewhouse, no pigstye, no poultry-yard! not a cabbage in the garden! not a useful thing about the house! Imagine her consternation!

But Barbara was a person of activity and resource. She sallied out forthwith to the neighbouring village, bought utensils and live stock; turned the coach-house into a cow-stall; projected a pigstye in the rosery; installed her ducks and geese in the orangery; introduced the novelty of real milk-pans, churns, and butter-prints amongst the old china, Dutch tiles, and stained glass of that make-believe toy, the Gothic dairy; placed her brewing vessels in "the housekeeper's room," which, to accord with the genius of the place, had been fitted up to represent a robber's cave; deposited her washing-tubs in the butler's pantry, which, with a similar regard to congruity, had been decorated with spars and shells like a Nereid's grotto; and finally, in spite of all warning and remonstrance, drove her sheep into the shrubbery, and tethered her cows upon the lawn.

This last stroke was too much for the gardener's patience. He betook himself in all haste to B. to apprise Mr. Walker; and Mr. Walker, armed with Mr. Samuel Tomkins and a copy of the lease, made his appearance with breathless speed at Rosedale. Barbara, in spite of her usual placidity, made good battle on this occasion. She cried, and scolded, and reasoned, and implored; it was as much as Mr. Walker and Mr. Samuel Tomkins, aided by their

mute witness, the lease, and that very clamorous auxiliary, the gardener, could do to out-talk her. At last, however, they were victorious. Poor Miss Bab's live stock were forced to make a rapid retreat, and she would probably have marched off at the same time, had not an incident occurred which brought her visions of rural felicity much nearer to reality than could have been anticipated by the liveliest imagination.

The farmer's wife of whom she had made her purchases, and to whom she unwillingly addressed herself to resume them, seeing, to use her own words, "how much madam seemed to take on at parting with the poor dumb things," kindly offered to accommodate them as boarders at a moderate stipend, volunteering also lessons in the chicken-rearing and pig-feeding department, of which the lady did, to be sure, stand rather in need.

Of course Barbara closed with this proposal at a word. She never was so happy in her life; her cows, pigs, and poultry, *en pension*, close by, where she might see them every hour if she liked, and she herself with both hands full, learning at the farm, and ordering at the cottage, and displaying all that can be imagined of ignorance and good humour at both.

Her mistakes were innumerable. Once, for instance, she carried away by main force from a turkey, whose nest she had the ill-luck to discover, thirteen eggs, just ready to hatch, and after a severe combat with the furious and injured hen, brought them home to Rosedale as fresh-laid —under a notion rather new in natural history, that turkeys lay all their eggs in one day. Another

time she discovered a hoard of choice double dahlia roots in a tool-house belonging to her old enemy, the gardener, and delivered them to the cook as Jerusalem artichokes, who dressed them as such accordingly. No end to Barbara's blunders! but her good humour, her cheerfulness, her liberality, and the happy frankness with which she laughed at her own mistakes, carried her triumphantly through. Everybody liked her, especially a smug little curate who lodged at the very farm-house where her pigs and cattle were boarded, and said twenty times a-day that Miss Barbara Jennings was the pleasantest woman in England. Barbara was never so happy in her life.

Miss Laura, on her part, continued rheumatic and poorly, and kept closely to her bed-chamber, the Turkish tent, with no other consolations than novels from the next town, and the daily visits of the apothecary. She was shocked at Miss Barbara's intimacy with the farm-people, and took every opportunity of telling her so. Barbara, never very fond of her fair companion's harangues, and not the more reconciled to them from their being directed against her own particular favourites, ran away as often as she could. So that the two friends had nearly arrived at the point of not speaking, when they met one afternoon by mutual appointment in the Chinese saloon. Miss Barbara blushed and looked silly, and seemed trying to say something which she could not bring out. Miss Laura tried to blush unsuccessfully. She, however, could talk at all times, her powers of speech were never known to fail; and at the end of an oration in which she proved, as was pretty evident, that they

had been mistaken in supposing the company of each all-sufficient to the other, as well as in their plan of seclusion from the world, she invited Miss Barbara, after another vain attempt at a blush, to pay the last honours to their friendship by attending her to the hymeneal altar, whither she had promised to accompany Mr. Opodeldoc on the morning after the next.

"I can't," replied Miss Barbara.

"And why not?" resumed Miss Laura. "Surely Mr. Opodel——"

"Now, don't be angry!" interrupted our friend Bab. "I can't be your bridesmaid the day after to-morrow, because I am going to be married to-morrow myself."

And so they left Rosedale, and I shall leave them.

A VISIT TO RICHMOND.

THE macadamised roads, and the light open carriages lately introduced, have so abridged, I had well nigh said annihilated distance in this fair island, that what used to be judged a journey is now a drive; our neighbourhood has become, from a reverse reason to theirs, as extensive as that of the good people in the back settlements of America; we think nothing of thirty miles for a morning call, or forty for a dinner-party; Richmond is quite within visiting distance, and London will shortly be our market-town.

This pleasant change was never so strongly impressed on my mind as by a hasty and most agreeable jaunt which I made to the former of these places during one of the few fine days last summer. The invitation, written one day, arrived in the course of post by breakfast-time the next, and without any uncomfortable hurry in packing or setting off, we were quietly dining with our kind inviters, rather before than after our usual hour, and might have returned very conveniently the same evening, had we been so minded.

There was some temptation to this exploit besides the very great one of whisking to and fro like a

jack o'lantern, and making all the village stare at our rapidity. Our road lay through the Forest, and we might have passed again by moonlight the old romantic royal town of Windsor, with its stately palace and its Shakespearian associations—I never catch a glimpse of those antique buildings but those "Merry Wives" and all their company start up before my eyes; might have heard the night-wind rustle amongst the venerable oaks and beeches of its beautiful park; might have seen the deer crouching in the fern, and the hare scudding across the glades; and as we paused to contemplate the magical effects of light and shadow which forest scenery displays at such an hour, might have seen the Castle in the distance, throwing its dark masses against the sky, and looking like some stupendous work of nature, or some grand dream of Gothic architecture, rather than an actual erection of man. Everybody that has seen Windsor by moonlight will understand how much one wishes to see that most striking sight again; but our friends were not people to run away from, besides, I wanted to get better acquainted with the celebrated spot where they resided—so we stayed.

"God made the Country and man made the Town!" I wonder in which of the two divisions Cowper would have placed Richmond. Every Londoner would laugh at the rustic who should call it town, and with foreigners it passes pretty generally for a sample (the only one they see) of the rural villages of England; and yet it is no more like the country—the real, untrimmed, genuine country—as we see it hereabouts, for instance, than a garden is like a field. I do not say this in disparagement. Richmond is nature in a court-dress, but still nature

—ay, and very lovely nature too, gay and happy and elegant as one of Charles the Second's beauties, and with as little to remind one of the original penalty of labour, or poverty, or grief, or crime. I suppose that since no place on the globe is wholly exempt from their influence, care and vice may exist even there. They are, however, well hidden. The inhabitants may find them, or they may find the inhabitants, but to the casual visitor Richmond appears as a sort of fairy-land, a piece of the old Arcadia, a holiday spot for ladies and gentlemen, where they lead a happy out-of-door life, like the gay folks in Watteau's pictures, and have nothing to do with the work-a-day world.

The principal charm of this smiling landscape is the river, the beautiful river; for the hill seems to me overrated. That celebrated prospect is, to my eye, too woody, too leafy, too green. There is a monotony of vegetation, a heaviness. The view was finer as I first saw it in February, when the bare branches admitted frequent glimpses of houses and villages, and the colouring was left to the fancy, than when arrayed in the pomp and garniture of "the leafy month of June." Canova said it only wanted crags. I rather incline to the old American criticism, and think that it wants clearing.

But the river! the beautiful river! there is no overrating that. Brimming to its very banks of meadow or of garden; clear, pure, and calm as the bright summer sky, which is reflected in clearer brightness from its bosom; no praise can be too enthusiastic for that glorious stream. How gracefully it glides through the graceful bridge! And how the boats become it! And how pretty those boats are, from

the small skiff of the market-woman laden with fruit and flowers, or the light-green pleasure vessel with its white awning and its gay freight of beaux and belles, to the heavy steamboat which comes walloping along with a regular mechanical combination of noise and motion, rumpling the quiet waters, and leaving a track of waves which vary most agreeably the level lake-like surface of the tranquil river. Certainly the Thames is the pleasantest highway in his Majesty's dominions.

Some of the happiest hours I ever passed in my life were spent on its bosom in one of those sweet and shady June mornings, when the light clouds seemed, as it were, following the sun, and enfolding him in a thousand veils of whiter alabaster, and the soft air came loaded with fragrance from gardens which were one flush of roses and honeysuckles. I shall not easily forget that morning. Gliding along through those beautiful scenes with companions worthy of their beauty; sunk in that silence of deep enjoyment, that delicious dreaminess which looks so like thought, although in reality a much wiser and happier thing; listening half unconsciously to Emily I.'s sweet Venetian ballads, the singer and her song so united to the scene and the hour; repeating almost as unconsciously as we met the Queen-birds,

> "The swans on fair St. Mary's lake
> Float double, swan and shadow;"

just roused as we passed Pope's grotto, or the arch over Strawberry Hill; and then landing at Hampton Court, the palace of the Cartoons and of the Rape of the Lock, and coming home with my mind

full of the divine Raphael, and of that glorious portrait of Titian by himself, which, next to the Cartoons, forms the chief ornament of that regal mansion; strangely chequered and intersected as those strange things, fancy and memory, are apt to be, by vivid images of the fair Belinda, and of that inimitable game at Ombre which will live longer than any painting, and can only die with the language. There is no forgetting that morning.

Another almost as pleasant was passed in going down the river towards Kew, amongst all sorts of royal recollections, from the remains of the house of Anne of Cleves, to the lime trees, fragrant with blossom and musical with bees, under which the late king and queen used to sit of a summer evening, whilst their children were playing round them on the grass. Kew Palace is in fine harmony with this pretty family scene. One likes to think of royalty so comfortable, and homely, and unconstrained, as it must have been in that small, ugly, old-fashioned house. Princes are the born thralls of splendour, and to see them eased of their cumbrous magnificence produces much such a sensation of pleasure as that which one feels in reading the fine passage of *Ivanhoe*, where the collar is taken from the neck of Gurth, and he leaps up a free man. At Kew, too, in those confined and ill-furnished rooms, the royal inhabitants were not without better luxuries; books accessible and readable, and looking as if they had been read, and a fine collection of cabinet pictures: superb Canalettis; the famous Dropsical Woman, on which the queen is said, during her last illness, to have fixed her eyes so frequently, and with such an intense expression

of self-pity; and a portrait of Vandyke, which rivals the Titian, the elegant Vandyke with his head over the shoulder, which has been so often engraved. What a noble race of men those great painters were! There is nothing in all their works grander or fuller of intellectual beauty than some of their own heads, as we find them recorded in their portraits of themselves, or in the interesting collection of Vasari.

This remark will hardly apply to one great painter, whose residence forms one of the many delightful associations of Richmond. Sir Joshua, who flattered all other persons, did himself so little justice, that in his own portraits he might pass for a dancing-master. His villa is here; rich in remembrances of Johnson and Boswell, and Goldsmith and Burke; here the spot where the poet Thomson used to write; here the elegant house of Owen Cambridge; close by, the celebrated villa of Pope, where one seems to see again Swift and Gay, St. John and Arbuthnot; a stone's throw off, the still more celebrated Gothic toy-shop, Strawberry Hill, which we all know so well from the minute and vivid descriptions of its master, the most amusing of letter-writers, the most fashionable of antiquaries, the most learned of *petis-maitres*, the cynical, finical, delightful Horace Walpole. Here, too, is Richmond Park, where Jeanie Deans and the Duke of Argyle met Queen Caroline: it has been improved, unluckily, and the walk where the interview took place no longer exists. To make some amends, however—for everything belonging to those delicious books assumes the form of historical interest, becomes an actual reality—to compensate for this disappointment, in removing some furniture from an old house in the

town, three portraits were discovered in the wainscot, George the Second, a staring likeness, between Lady Suffolk and Queen Caroline. The paintings were the worst of that bad era, but the position of the three and the recollection of Jeanie Deans was irresistible; those pictures ought never to be separated.

But of all the celebrated villas round Richmond, none pleased me better than one which seemed so unsuited to that gay scene, that one cannot look at it without wondering how it came there. I speak of Ham House, a stately old place, retired from the river, which is concealed and divided from it by rows of huge trees.

Ham House is a perfect model of the mansion of the last century, with its dark shadowy front, its steps and terraces, its marble basins, and its deep silent court, whose iron gate, as Horace Walpole used to complain, was never opened. Everything about it belongs to the time of hoops and periwigs. Harlow Place must have been just such an abode of stateliness and seclusion. Those iron gates seem to have been erected for no other purpose than to divide Lovelace from Clarissa; they look so stern and so unrelenting. We almost expect to see her through them, sweeping slowly along the terrace-walk in the pure dignity of her swan-like beauty, with her jealous sister watching her from a window; and we look for him, too, at the corner of the wall, waiting to deposit a letter, and listening with a speaking eagerness to the rustle of her silk gown. If there were any Clarissas now-a-days they would certainly be found at Ham House. And the keeping is so perfect. The very flowers are old-fashioned. No American borders, no kalmias or azaleas or magnolias, or such heathen shrubs! No

flimsy China roses! Nothing new-fangled! None but flowers of the olden time, arranged in gay formal knots, staid, and prim, and regular, and without a leaf awry. Add but round Dutch honeysuckles, and I daresay that Fletcher's beautiful song, which I shall borrow to conclude my description, might comprise the whole catalogue.

"Roses, their sharp spines being gone,
Not royal in their smell alone,
But in their hue;
Virgin pinks of odours faint,
Daisies smell less but most quaint,
And sweet thyme true.

Primrose, first-born child of Ver,
Merry spring-time's harbinger,
With her bells dim,
Oxlips in their cradles growing,
Marigolds on death beds blowing,
* Lark-heels trim."

* Of course the flower that we now call larkspur. I have attributed this charming song (the bridal song from the Two Noble Kinsmen) to Fletcher—but it may belong to a still greater poet, for certainly Shakespeare was art and part in that beautiful tragedy.

HAYMAKING.

AMONGST the country employments of England none is so delightful to see or to think of as haymaking. It comes in the pleasantest season, amidst a green, and flowery, and sunshiny world; it has for scene the prettiest places—park, or lawn, or meadow, or upland pasture; and withal it has more of innocent merriment, more of the festivity of an out-of-door sport, and less of the drudgery and weariness of actual labour, than any other of the occupations of husbandry. One looks on it, pretty picture as it is, without the almost saddening sympathy produced by the slow and painful toil of the harvest-field, and, moreover, one looks on it much oftener. A very little interval of dressed garden shall divide a great country mansion from the demesne, where hay-cocks repose under noble groups of oaks and elms, or mingle their fragrance with the snowy wreaths of the acacia, or the honeyed tassels of the lime; and the fair and delicate lady who cannot tell wheat from barley, and the mincing fine gentleman who "affects an *ignorance* if he have it not," shall yet condescend not merely to know hay when they see it, but even to take some interest in the process of getting it up. In short, at the most aristocratic

country tables, from the high-sheriff of the county to the lord-lieutenant, hay is a permitted subject; and the state of the clouds, or of the weather-glass, shall be inquired into as diligently, and be listened to with as much attention, as speculations on the St. Leger or the Derby, discussions on the breed of pheasants, or calculations on a contested election. Hay is very naturally felt to be a gentlemanly topic, since from the richest to the poorest every country gentleman is a hay-owner.

I have been used all my life to take a lively interest, and even so much participation as may belong to a mere spectator, in this pleasant labour; for I cannot say that I ever actually handled the fork or the rake. In former times our operations were on a grand scale, since the lawn before and around our old house, and the park-like paddock behind, were of such an extent as to make the getting in of the crop an affair of considerable moment in a pecuniary point of view. Now we have in our own hands only two small fields, the one a meadow of some three acres, about a mile off, the other a bit of upland pasture not much bigger, and rather nearer. The consequence of which diminution of property is, than I am ten times more interested in our small possession than ever I was in our large demesne, and that the produce of these two little bits of land—the minikin rick, not much better than a hay-cock itself, all of which is to be consumed by that special friend of mine, our pretty, frisky cream-coloured horse,* of whom it is every day predicted that he will break our

* Now, alas! no more! Would that the beauty were alive again, even if he did put our lives in jeopardy! I shall never entertain so strong a personal friendship for any steed.

necks—appears much more important in my eyes than the mountains of dried grass, which, after feeding some dozen horses, and half-a-dozen cows, were sold out amongst the inn-keepers, coach proprietors, cattle-dealers, and hay-buyers of all sorts, and sometimes, in a plentiful year, had even the honour to be advertised in a country newspaper, put up to public sale, puffed by the auctioneer, abused by the bidders, talked about, and lied about, and finally knocked down by the hammer—as great a piece of promotion as a hay-rick can well come to.

This trick of estimating one's possessions in an inverse ratio to their real value is, I believe, strange as the assertion may seem, no uncommon freak of that whimsical, but good-for-*something* piece of perversity called human nature. In my own case I can, besides, claim in mitigation for the mistake (if mistake it be to take an interest in anything innocent!) the extreme beauty of the two patches of ground on which grows the hay in question.

One of these grassplots is a breezy, airy, upland field, abutting on the southernmost nook of an open common, forming, so to say, one side of a sunny bay, half filled with a large clear pond of bright water, water always bright; the first swallows of the year are regularly seen there; a great farm-house with its bustling establishment directly opposite; a winding road leading across the green; and trees, cottages, children, horses, cows, sheep, and geese, scattered around in the gayest profusion—a living and moving picture. The most populous street of a populous city gives a less vivid idea of habitation than the view from the gate, or from the high bank, feathered with broom and hazel—for the fence consists rather

of a ditch than of a hedge, the field being, as it were, moated—of that lightsome and cheerful bit of pasture land.

The more distant meadow is prettier still; it has no regular approach, and is reached only through a chain of fields belonging to different neighbours, whose gates, close locked upon all other occasions, open only to admit the ponderous hay waggon, creaking under its burthen, and the noisy procession of pitchers and rakers by which it is accompanied. Surrounded by close and high hedges, richly studded by hedge-row timber, no spot can be more completely shut out from the world than this small meadow. A stream of considerable variety and beauty winds along one end, fringed on each margin by little thickets of copse wood, hawthorn, and hazel, mixed with trees of a larger growth, and clothed, intertwisted, matted, by garlands of wild rose and wild honeysuckle; whilst here and there a narrow strip of turf intervenes between these natural shrubberies and the sparkling, glittering, babbling stream, which runs so clearly over its narrow bed that every shoal of minnows is visible as they pass. Every vagary that a nameless brooklet well can play does this brook show off in its short course across the end of our meadow; now driven rapidly through a narrow channel by the curvature of the banks, fretting, and fuming, and chafing over the transparent pebbles; now creeping gently between clusters of the rich willow herb and golden flag; now sleeping quietly in a wider and deeper pool, where the white waterlily has found room for its dark leaves and its snowy flowers, and where those quiet but treacherous waters seem about to undermine the grassy margent which already over-

hangs them, and to lay bare the roots of the old willows. On the banks of that tricksy stream lies the scene of our little story.

Last summer was, as most of my readers probably remember, one of no small trial to haymakers in general, the weather being what is gently and politely termed "unsettled," which in this pretty climate of ours, during "the leafy month of June," may commonly be construed into cloudy, stormy, drizzly, cold. In this instance the silky, courtly, flattering epithet, being translated, could hardly mean other than wet—fixed, determined, settled rain. From morning to night the clouds were dropping; roses stood tottering on their stalks; strawberries lay sopping in their beds; cherries and currants hung all forlorn on their boughs, with the red juice washed out of them; gravel roads turned into sand; pools into ponds; ditches into rivulets; rivers overflowed their channels; and that great evil —a summer flood—appeared inevitable. "The rain it raineth every day" was the motto for the month. Sheridan's wicked interpolation in Mr. Coleridge's tragedy, "drip, drip, drip, there's nothing here but dripping," seemed made expressly for the season. Cut or uncut, the grass was spoiling; the more the hay was made the clearer it appeared that it would never make to any purpose; the poor cattle shook their ears as if aware of an impending scarcity; salt, the grand remedy for sopped hay, rose in the market; farmers fretted, and gentlemen fumed.*

* It is well if they did no worse. A fair young friend of mine, whose father, one of the most accomplished persons that I have ever known, and by no means addicted to the use of naughty words on common occasions, rented about thirty acres of water-

So passed the "merry month of June." Towards the beginning of July, however, matters mended. A new moon made her appearance in the world, and that great stranger, the sun, as if out of compliment to his fair, cold sister, ventured out of the clouds to salute her across the sky, one evening just before his usual time of setting, and even continued the civility by leaving behind him such a glow of purple rosiness, and such a line of golden light, as illumined the whole horizon, and gave the most gracious promise for the ensuing day—a promise unusually well kept for so great a personage—that is to say, not quite forgotten. The weather, to be sure, was not quite perfect—when was the weather ever known to be so?—it was, on the contrary, of that description which is termed "catching;" but still there were intervals of brightness; the rain was less heavy; the sun did shine sometimes; and even when he refused to show that resplendent face of his, a light stirring breeze answered all haymaking purposes almost as well. In short, between wind and sunshine, we managed to get in our upland crop with little danger and less damage, and encouraged by that success, and by the slow, gentle rising of the weather-glass, which the knowing in such matters affirm to be much more reliable than a sudden and violent jump of the quicksilver, we gave orders to cut the little mead without delay, and prepared for a day's haymaking in that favourite spot.

meadow, known by the name of "the moors," used always to call the haymaking time his "swearing month." He was wont to laugh at the expression—but I never heard him deny that it was true.

We were not without other encouragements with respect to the weather. The sun himself had had the goodness to make "a golden set" and a rosy dawning, and those vegetable barometers, the scarlet pimpernel in the hedgerows, and the purple Venus's looking-glass in the garden, threw open their rich cups to receive his earliest beams, with a fulness of expansion seldom shown by those, I had almost said, sentient flowers, when there is the slightest appearance of rain. Our good neighbour the shoemaker, too, an in-door oracle, whose speculations on the atmosphere are not very remarkable for their correctness, prognosticated wet; whilst our other good neighbour, Farmer Bridgwater, an out-of-door, practical personage, whose predictions—and it is saying much for them—are almost as sure to come true as the worthy cordwainer's to prove false, boldly asseverated that the day would prove fine, and made his preparations and mustered his troops (for Farmer Bridgwater is generalissimo in our hay-field) with a vigour and energy that would have become a higher occasion. He set six men on to mowing by a little after sunrise, and collected fourteen efficient haymakers by breakfast-time. Fourteen active haymakers for our poor three acres! not to count the idle assistants; we ourselves, with three dogs and two boys to mind them, advisers who came to find fault and look on, babies who came to be nursed, children who came to rock the babies, and other children who came to keep the rockers company and play with the dogs; to say nothing of this small rabble, we had fourteen able-bodied men and women in one hay-field, besides the six mowers who had got the

grass down by noon, and finding the strong beer good and plentiful, magnanimously volunteered to stay and help to get in the crop. N.B.—This abundance of aid is by no means so extravagant as it seems, especially in catching weather. Beer, particularly in country affairs, will go twice as far as money, and, if discreetly administered (for we must not make even haymakers quite tipsy), really goes as near to supply the place of the sun as anything well can do. In our case the good double X was seconded by this bright luminary, and our operations prospered accordingly.

Besides being a numerous, ours was a merry group, very merry and very noisy; for amongst the country people, as amongst children, those two words may almost be reckoned synonymous. There was singing that might pass for screaming; laughter that burst forth in peals and in shouts; and talking in every variety of key, from the rough, bluff, commanding halloo of Farmer Bridgwater, issuing his orders from one end of the field to another, to the shrill cry of Dame Wilson's baby, which seemed to pierce upwards, and cleave the very sky. A mingled buzz of talking was, however, the predominant sound, talking of which little could be collected except a general expression of happiness, Dame Wilson's roaring infant being, with one exception, the only dissatisfied person in the field.

Nobody could imagine the joyous din of that little place. A "jovial crew" they were, though by no means "merry beggars;" for our haymakers were for that profession persons of respectability, rather, indeed, amateurs than professors—saving, perhaps, Dame Wilson and her set of boys and girls, who

might be accounted poor, and a certain ragged Irishman called Jerry, who comes over every year harvesting, and is a general favourite with high and low; with these small drawbacks (N.B.—Dame Wilson is a mountain of a woman, at least five feet in the girth, and Jerry a maypole of a man, who stands six feet three without his shoes), with these trifling exceptions, our troop of haymakers might really pass for people of substance.

First came the commander-in-chief, Farmer Bridgwater, a hearty sturdy old bachelor, rough and bluff, and merry, and kind, a great although a general admirer of our pretty lasses, to whom his blunt compliments and rustic raillery, of which the point lay rather in a knowing wink, a sly turn of the head, and a peculiar dryness of manner, than in the words, added to his unfailing good nature, rendered him always welcome.

Next in the list figures our respectable neighbour, Aaron Keep, the shoemaker, who came to help us and to watch the weather. He is an excellent person is Aaron Keep, and he came, as he said, to help us; and I dare say he would have been very sorry if the hay had been quite spoiled; nevertheless, having predicted that it would rain, I cannot help thinking he considered it a little hard that no rain came. The least little shower, just to confirm his prognostics, would have made him happy, and he kept watching the clouds, and hoping and foretelling a thunderstorm; but the clouds were obstinate, and the more he predicted that a storm would come, the more it stayed away.

Then arrived Master Wheatley, our worthy neighbour, the wheelwright, who, being also parish con-

stable, might have abated the noise if he himself had not been the noisiest. I think he came to please his daughter Mary, a smiling airy damsel of thirteen, who never made hay before in her life. How enraptured the little girl was with the holiday! My dog Dash was the only creature in the field gay enough to keep pace with her frolics. They were playmates during the whole day.

Mine host of the Rose was also present, that model of all village landlords, mine host in his red waistcoat; and he also brought with him his pretty daughters, lasses of eighteen and twenty, who care no more for poor Dash than I do for a wax doll; I dare say they don't even know that he's a spaniel. Lucy had been to London this spring, and brought home a beau, whom she had picked up there, as a visitor to her papa, and, our hay-field being a good place for love-making, there too was he, displaying in handling a prong all the awkwardness that might be expected from a Cheapside haberdasher accustomed to the yard. He laughed at himself, however, with a very good grace, and seemed a well-conditioned and well-behaved person, his misfortune of cockneyism notwithstanding. They said that Miss Lucy would soon leave the Rose and take to measuring ribands herself. Patty, too, the round-faced, rosy-cheeked, fair-haired, younger sister, my favourite (but that is a secret, for both are equally civil, and, as far as I know, equally good; I would not make any difference in the world, only—Patty is my favourite); Patty, said the world—the village world—was also not unlikely to leave the Rose, though for an abode only two doors removed from it; Mr. George Waring, our smart young saddler, having, they affirmed, won her heart; but

upon looking out for Patty and George, thinking to find them engaged as the other couple were, what was my astonishment to see the poor little lass, her smiles gone and her roses faded, moping under the hedge alone, rather making believe to rake than actually raking; whilst Mr. George Waring was tossing about the hay in company with the handsome brunette Sally Wheeler, who was just (as I remembered to have heard) come home from service to be married, and looked prodigiously as if the young saddler was her intended spouse. Nothing was ever more suspicious. He looked brighter and gayer than ever, and so did Sally, and for certain they were talking of something interesting, something at which the gentleman smiled and the lady blushed, talking so earnestly that they even forgot to toss the hay about, and that Farmer Bridgwater's loudest reprimand, although it startled every one else in the field, was apparently unheard by either of them.

"Alas! I fear Mr. George Waring will play poor Patty false," was my involuntary thought, as I glided amongst the thickets by the side of the stream, and established myself in a verdant nook quite out of sight of the gay scene I had quitted, from which I was parted by a natural shrubbery of honeysuckle and wild roses, covered with blossoms and over-canopied by the spreading branches of a large oak. A pleasant seat was that green bank, with the clear water flowing at my feet, gay with the yellow flag, the white lily, and the blue forget-me-not, and fragrant with the rich tufts of the elegant meadow-sweet, mingling its delicious odour with that of the wild rose, the honeysuckle, and the new-mown hay. A pleasant seat was that turfy bank, and, as the haymakers

adjourned to the farther end of the field to dinner, a quiet one; until suddenly I heard first a deep sigh, and then two voices, from the other side of the oak tree. I listened with somewhat of curiosity, but more of interest, to the following dialogue:—

"Why, my queen," said the bluff, good-humoured voice of Farmer Bridgewater, "what are you moping here for? And what have you done with your rosy cheeks? A'nt you well?"

"Yes," answered the sighing Patty.

"Go to dinner, then," responded the generalissimo of the hay-field.

"No," sighed the damsel; "I'd rather stay here."

"Shall Lucy bring you something to eat?" pursued the good farmer.

"No."

"Or your father?"

"No."

"Or Aaron Keep? I see he has done."

"No."

"Or little Mary Wheatley? she'll be here like a bird."

"No, I don't want any dinner, thank you;" and then came a deep sigh—such a sigh!

"Or I myself?" continued the honest farmer, not at all diverted from his purpose.

"No. It's very good of you," said Patty, half crying, "and I am very much obliged—but——"

"Perhaps you'd rather George Waring should bring it?" pursued the pertinacious inquirer, with a slight change of voice. "I'll go and send him directly."

"Don't think of such a thing," interrupted Patty, breathlessly; "he's engaged."

"No," chuckled the farmer, "that business is over;

Sally and he have settled the wedding-day, and I have recommended you for bridesmaid."

"Me!"

"Ay, you! One wedding leads to another. Wednesday week is to be the day; and after George Waring has given Sally to his brother Tom, he'll have an excellent opportunity for courting you."

"Tom! Tom Waring! Of whom are you speaking?"

"Of George's brother, to be sure, and Sally's beau. There he is, just come into the field. Did you never hear of Tom Waring? He only arrived from Andover last night, where Sally and he have been living next door to each other; and now they are going to marry and settle, as true lovers should. Why, what's the girl crying for?" exclaimed the good farmer, "crying and smiling, and blushing, and looking so happy! Did you think George was making love to her in his own proper person, you goosecap? Will you come to dinner now, you simpleton? you'd better, or I'll tell."

"Oh, Farmer Bridgwater!"

"Wipe your eyes and come to dinner, or I'll send George Waring to fetch you; come along, I say."

"Oh, Farmer Bridgwater!" and off they marched; and the next I saw of the haymakers, George and Patty were at work together, and so were Tom and Sally, looking as happy all the four as ever people could do in this world.

LOST AND FOUND.

ANYBODY may be lost in a wood. It is well for me to have so good an excuse for my wanderings! for I am rather famous for such misadventures, and have sometimes been accused by my kindest friends of committing intentional blunders, and going astray out of *malice prepense*. To be sure, when in two successive rambles I contrived to get mazed on Burghfield Common, and bewildered in Kibe's Lane, those exploits did seem to overpass the common limits of stupidity. But in a wood, and a strange wood, a new place, a fresh country, untrodden ground beneath the feet, unknown land-marks before the eyes, wiser folks than I might require the silken clue of Rosamond, or the bag of ashes given to Finette Cendron (*Anglice*, Cinderella) by the good fairy her godmother, to help them home again. Now, my luck exceeded even hers of the Glass Slipper, for I found something not unlike the good fairy herself, in the pleasant earthly guise of an old friend. But I may as well begin my story.

About two years ago we had the misfortune to lose one of the most useful and popular inhabitants of our village, Mrs. Bond, the butterwoman. She—for although there was a very honest and hard-

working Farmer Bond, who had the honour to be Mrs. Bond's husband, she was so completely the personage of the family that nobody ever thought of him—she lived on a small dairy-farm at the other side of the parish, where she had reared ten children in comfort and respectability, contriving in all years and in all seasons to look and to be flourishing, happy, and contented, and to drive her tilted cart twice a-week into B., laden with the richest butter, the freshest eggs, and the finest poultry of the county. Never was market-woman so reliable as Mrs. Bond, so safe to deal with, or so pleasant to look at. She was a neat, comely woman of five-and-forty, or thereabout, with dark hair, laughing eyes, a bright smile, and a brighter complexion—red and white like a daisy. People used to say how pretty she must have been; but I think she was then in the prime of her good looks; just as a full-blown damask rose is more beautiful than the same flower in the bud.

Very pleasant she was to look at, and still pleasanter to talk to; she was so gentle, so cheerful, so respectful, and so kind. Everybody in the village loved Mrs. Bond. Even Lizzy and May, the two most aristocratical of its inhabitants, and the most tenacious of the distinctions of rank, would run to meet the butter cart as if it were a carriage and four; a mark of preference which the good-humoured dairywoman did not fail to acknowledge and confirm by gifts suited to their respective tastes—an occasional pitcher of butter-milk to May, and a stick with cherries tied round it to poor Lizzy.

Nor was Mrs. Bond's bounty confined to largesses of so suspicious a nature as presents to the pets of

a good customer. I have never known any human being more thoroughly and universally generous, more delicate in her little gifts, or with so entire an absence of design or artifice in her attentions. It was a prodigality of kindness that seemed never weary of well-doing. What posies of pinks and sweet-williams, backed by marjoram and rosemary, she used to carry to the two poor old ladies who lodged at the pastry-cook's at B.! What faggots of lilac and laburnum she would bring to deck the poor widow Hay's open hearth! What baskets of water-cresses, the brownest, the bitterest, and the crispest of the year, for our fair neighbour, the nymph of the shoe-shop, a delicate girl, who could only be tempted into her breakfast by that pleasant herb! What pots of honey for John Brown's cough! What gooseberries and currants for the baker's little children! And as soon as her great vine ripened, what grapes for everybody! No wonder that when Mrs. Bond left the parish to occupy a larger farm in a distant county, her absence was felt as a misfortune by the whole village; that poor Lizzy inquired after her every day for a week; and that May watched for the tilted cart every Wednesday and Friday for a month or more.

I myself joined very heartily in the general lamentation. But time and habit reconcile us to most privations, and I must confess that, much as I liked her, I had nearly forgotten our good butterwoman, until an adventure which befell me last week placed me once more in the way of her ready kindness.

I was on a visit at a considerable distance from home, in one of the most retired parts of Oxfordshire. Nothing could be more beautiful than the situation,

or less accessible; shut in amongst woody hills, remote from great towns, with deep chalky roads, almost impassable, and a broad bridgeless river, coming, as if to intercept your steps, whenever you did seem to have fallen into a beaten track. It was exactly the country and the season in which to wander about all day long.

One fair morning I set out on my accustomed ramble. The sun was intensely hot; the sky almost cloudless; I had climbed a long abrupt ascent, to enjoy the sight of the magnificent river, winding like a snake amidst the richly-clothed hills; the pretty village, with its tapering spire; and the universal freshness and brilliancy of the gay and smiling prospect—too gay, perhaps! I gazed till I became dazzled with the glare of the sunshine, oppressed by the very brightness, and turned into a beech wood by the side of the road, to seek relief from the overpowering radiance. These beech woods should rather be called coppices. They are cut down occasionally, and consist of long flexible stems, growing out of the old roots. But they are like no other coppices, or rather none other can be compared with them. The young beechen stems, perfectly free from underwood, go arching and intertwining overhead, forming a thousand mazy paths, covered by a natural trellis; the shining green leaves, just bursting from their golden sheaths, contrasting with the smooth silvery bark, shedding a cool green light around, and casting a thousand dancing shadows on the mossy flowery path, pleasant to the eye and to the tread, a fit haunt for wood-nymph or fairy. There is always much of interest in the mystery of a wood; the uncertainty produced by the confined boundary; the objects

which crowd together, and prevent the eye from penetrating to any distance; the strange flickering mixture of shadow and sunshine, the sudden flight of birds—oh, it was enchanting! I wandered on, quite regardless of time or distance, now admiring the beautiful wood-sorrel which sprang up amongst the old roots—now plucking the fragrant wood-roof—now trying to count the countless varieties of woodland-moss, till, at length, roused by my foot's catching in a rich trail of the white-veined ivy, which crept, wreathing and interlaced, over the ground, I became aware that I was completely lost, had entirely forsaken all track, and out-travelled all landmarks. The wood was, I knew, extensive, and the ground so tumbled about, that every hundred yards presented some flowery slope or broken dell, which added greatly to the picturesqueness of the scenery, but much dimished my chance of discovery or extrication.

In this emergency I determined to proceed straight onward, trusting in this way to reach at last one side of the wood, although I could not at all guess which; and I was greatly solaced, after having walked about a quarter of a mile, to find myself crossed by a rude cart track; and still more delighted, on proceeding a short distance farther, to hear sounds of merriment and business; none of the softest, certainly, but which gave token of rustic habitation; and to emerge suddenly from the close wood, amongst an open grove of huge old trees, oaks with their brown-plaited leaves, cherries covered with snowy garlands, and beeches almost as gigantic as those of Windsor Park, contrasting, with their enormous trunks and majestic spread of bough, the light and flexible stems of the coppice I had left.

I had come out at one of the highest points of the wood, and now stood on a platform overlooking a scene of extraordinary beauty. A little to the right, in a very narrow valley, stood an old farmhouse, with pointed roofs and porch and pinnacles, backed by a splendid orchard, which lay bathed in the sunshine, exhaling its fresh aromatic fragrance, all one flower; just under me was a strip of rich meadow land, through which a stream ran sparkling, and directly opposite a ridge of hanging coppices, surrounding and crowning, as it were, an immense old chalk-pit, which, overhung by bramble, ivy, and a hundred pendent weeds, irregular and weather-stained, had an air as venerable and romantic as some grey ruin. Seen in the gloom and stillness of evening, or by the pale glimpses of the moon, it would have required but little aid from the fancy to picture out the broken shafts and mouldering arches of some antique abbey. But, besides that daylight is the sworn enemy of such illusions, my attention was imperiously claimed by a reality of a very different kind. One of the gayest and noisiest operations of rural life—sheep-washing—was going on in the valley below—

> "the turmoil that unites
> Clamour of boys with innocent despites
> Of barking dogs, and bleatings from strange fear."
>
> —WORDSWORTH.

All the inhabitants of the farm seemed assembled in the meadow. I counted a dozen, at least, of men and boys of all ages, from the stout, sunburnt, vigorous farmer of fifty, who presided over the operation, down to the eight-year old urchin, who, screaming, running, and shaking his ineffectual stick after an eloped

sheep, served as a sort of aide-de-camp to the sheep-dog. What a glorious scene of confusion it was! what shouting! what scuffling! what glee! Four or five young men, and one amazon of a barefooted girl, with her petticoats tucked up to her knees, stood in the water where it was pent between two hurdles, ducking, sousing, and holding down by main force, the poor, frightened, struggling sheep, who kicked, and plunged, and bleated, and butted, and, in spite of their imputed innocence, would certainly, in the ardour of self-defence, have committed half-a-dozen homicides, if their power had equalled their inclination. The rest of the party were fully occupied; some in conducting the purified sheep, who showed a strong disposition to go the wrong way, back to their quarters; others in leading the uncleansed part of the flock to their destined ablution, from which they also testified a very ardent and active desire to escape. Dogs, men, boys, and girls, were engaged in marshalling these double processions, the order of which was constantly interrupted by the outbreaking of some runaway sheep, who turned the march into a pursuit, to the momentary increase of the din which seemed already to have reached the highest possible pitch.

The only quiet persons in the field were a delicate child of nine years old and a blooming woman of forty-five—a comely, blooming woman, with dark hair, bright eyes, and a complexion like a daisy, who stood watching the sheep-washers with the happiest smiles, and was evidently the mother of half the lads and lasses in the *melée*. It would be, and it was, no other than my friend Mrs. Bond, and resolving to make myself and my difficulties known to her, I scrambled down no very smooth or convenient path,

and keeping a gate between me and the scene of action, contrived, after sundry efforts, to attract her attention.

Here, of course, my difficulties ceased. But if I were to tell how glad she was to see her old neighbour, how full of kind questions and of hospitable cares—how she would cut the great cake intended for the next day's sheep-shearing, would tap her two-year-old currant wine, would gather a whole bush of early honeysuckles, and finally would see me home herself, I being, as she observed, rather given to losing my way—if I were to tell all these things, when should I have done? I will rather conclude in the words of an old French fairy tale:—"*Je crains déjà d'avoir abusé à la patience du lecteur. Je finis avant qu'il me disent finir.*"

SEA-SIDE RECOLLECTIONS.

LIKE most of the inhabitants of this little island I have been occasionally in the habit of spending some of the summer months, and the early part of the autumn by the sea.* But excepting for one twelvemonth of my life I was never a resident on the coast, and that residence occurred when I was between the ages of eight and ten; rather short of the one period, and somewhat turned of the other. That was my only opportunity of making acquaintance with the mighty ocean in its winter sublimity of tempest and storm; and partly, perhaps, from the striking and awful nature of the impression, partly from some peculiarity of character and of situation, as a lonely, musing, visionary child, the recollection remains indelibly

* Upon it I have not often trusted myself, being somewhat of Bishop Hall's mind, who uses the following racy expressions with regard to a voyage which he had occasion to take. "The sea brooked not me, nor I it; an unquiet element made only for wonder and use, not for pleasure. Alighted once from that wooden conveyance and uneven way I bethought myself how fondly life is committed to an unsteady and reeling piece of wood, to fickle winds, and restless waters, whilst we may set foot on steadfast and constant earth." What would the good bishop have said to steamboats, and the added dangers of explosion and fire?

fixed in my memory, fresh and vivid, as if of yesterday. It was a bold and dangerous coast, and the wintry tempest was as perilous as it seemed. Often and often have I, refusing to go to bed, watched at an upper window with a maid whose business it was to attend me, on a December night, striving to catch a glimpse, through the almost palpable darkness, of some vessel struggling with the gale, whose position was shown momentarily by the brief glare of the minute gun, calling for unavailing aid, or the brighter flash of the lightning which illumined the sea and sky in lurid flame, only to leave them in a more frightful obscurity. I have gazed through many a midnight with intense and breathless interest on scenes like these; and then in the morning I have seen the cold bright wintry sun shining gaily on the dancing sea, still stirred by the last breath of the tempest, and on the floating spars and parted timbers of the wreck. Once, too, and only once, I saw a human body thrown on shore amid the rocks. I had watched the dark and strange-looking object (it was the corpse of a sailor) as it lay tossing on the waves, without in the slightest degree suspecting that it was a dead body, until a fearful and unearthly shriek from a group of women assembled on the beach, informed me that the helpless and almost shapeless object which the waves had just flung ashore, was no other than the swollen and blackened remains of a fellow-creature. I shall never forget that shriek. The wreck had been a trading vessel belonging to the port, and the women assembled were the wives, mothers, sisters, and children of the crew; one of whom had recognised her father in the disfigured corpse. I never can forget that cry.

The place of our residence was an old sea-port on the southern coast of England, about a hundred and fifty miles from London, and situated on the point of union between two counties, the principal part of the town being, I believe, in Dorset; but the character of the scenery, the boldness of the coast, and the rich woodiness of the inland views, varied by hill and dale, and sparkling streamlet, belonged entirely to Devonshire, beautiful Devonshire. The town itself was of great antiquity, and considerable historical interest, not much frequented as a watering-place, although occasionally resorted to by some of the wealthy inhabitants of Bristol, who preferred it to the gayer and showier, but less convenient marine villages which had sprung into fashion on the Devonshire coast, and still distinguished by its fine harbour, its magnificent pier, the large coasting trade consequent on these advantages, and the degree of political importance almost inevitably attached to a borough which possesses the troublesome privilege of returning two members to serve in parliament.

Our habitation, although situated not merely in the town but in the principal street, had nothing in common with the small and undistinguished houses on either side and in front, although they again were widely different from the smart and unsubstantial rows and crescents of a flourishing watering-place, being, for the most part, old, dingy, and irregular, a miserable mixture of shabby shops, noisy hotels, and lodging-houses fitted up in Queen Anne's days.

Our residence might lay claim to even an earlier date. It was a very large-fronted stone mansion, terminated at either end by massive iron gates, the pillars to which were surmounted with spread eagles

(the crest, probably, of the first possessor), and balanced by an old-fashioned stone porch with seats in the centre of the house, which, as well as the whole frontage, was covered with the luxuriant myrtles, passion-flowers, white jessamine, and moss-roses, peculiar to the mild climate of our southern coast. The house itself, infinitely too large for our family, was built round a quadrangle, or interior court, the best apartment looking on a small lawn surrounded by trees and shrubs (the arbutus especially, I remember, was in splendid profusion), and terminated by a large conservatory.

Behind this walk was a series of hanging gardens parted by hedges of myrtles and roses and descending down a sharp declivity planted with strawberries* (always so beautiful and so fragrant, whether in the leaf, the flower, or the fruit) to a shallow, babbling brook, on the other side of which was a meadow richly dotted with timber trees, and edged at the extremity by a double row of limes which completely shut out all sight or sound of the suburban cottages on the other side of the enclosure. One

* The mixture of strawberry beds, and, indeed, of fruit in general, adds much to the charms of a flower garden. One of the prettiest that I know is the lady's garden at Maiden Erleigh, originally a large kitchen garden enclosed by high walls, but sloping to the south, and so well adapted to flowers that the vegetables have been banished, whilst the fruit-trees and berry bushes have been suffered to retain their station, giving just the variety of light and darkness, sun and shade, which the plants require, and adding their own beauties of bright blossom and pendant fruit to the tulips and dahlias. I do not know anything prettier than to see the lovely daughters of that hospitable house plucking baskets of grapes or nosegays of geraniums for some favoured guest.

of these gardens, that which I was permitted to call mine, had, underneath the high steep bank which divided it from the lawn, a rudely built but very tasteful grotto, formed of portions of rock, shells, ores, and aquatic plants, at the innermost end of which gushed a natural spring, never overflowing its small sandy basin, and yet always full; there, doubtless, it is still. Years many and long have passed since I have sat beside that tiny fountain, and yet never have I forgotten the intense pleasure which I derived from watching its clear and crystal wave:—

> "Long may the spring,
> Quietly as a sleeping infant's breath,
> Send up cold waters to the *sojourner*
> With soft and even pulse! nor ever cease
> Yon tiny cone of sand its soundless dance
> Which at the bottom, like a fairy's page,
> As merry and no taller, dances still,
> Nor wrinkles the smooth surface of the fount
> Where twilight is and coolness: here is moss,
> A soft seat, and a deep and ample shade."
>
> COLERIDGE.

Next to delight in that grotto was my love for a chamber miscalled my play-room, opening out of my nursery, from which it descended by a short flight of stairs, with an old Gothic balustrade, which, together with an arched ceiling, high and narrow pointed windows far above my reach, and the carved oak panelling which covered the walls, gave an air of gloom and solemnity to the apartment. Here I had a great collection of ores, spars, shells, and petrifactions, the toys which at that time I loved best, and in arranging them, and poring over the books of our large and rich English library, the

hours of my lonely and uncompanioned childhood were principally spent. Bishop Percy's collection of old ballads was, I think, the book that I read most, and if I have been and am still dreamy, meditative, visionary, and melancholy, it is, I verily believe, to the influence of that one year passed in a stately and gloomy seclusion, pursuing, amidst the grandeur of nature, a course of reading only calculated to feed the romance of a shy and concentrated character, that I owe a turn of mind so ill-fitted to meet the demands of a stirring and busy world. Certainly I would not so rear a child.

This influence of local situation on a girl so young was, however, undreamt of by my parents. A person of good character, a sort of English Bonne, half-servant and half-governess, had the nominal charge of me, and was well content with my quietness and docility; my dear mother had three or four young relations, misses in their teens, staying with her during nearly the whole time, and was sufficiently occupied in playing the chaperon to the dull gaieties of the place, taking them to the half-empty rooms, the prim parties, and the formal balls which the season might afford. A tedious duty was that, heaven knows! Of course, I was too young to be admitted to the society, such as it was; but I had even then a glimmering perception of its being anything but exhilarating—so few persons and so many pretensions—such a jostling of poor gentility with vulgar riches—such an overflow of ladies and such a paucity of men. The leader of the genteel party was a dowager-countess, almost past everything but carpet-work and quadrille; a tall, pale, shadowy figure, with as few words

as a well-accomplished parrot, and I suppose about the same quantity of idea. Her rival was the rich wife of a Bristol merchant, a tun of a woman, abounding in loud, vulgar talk, and full of coarse hospitality and noisy good humour. I rather think that she was the more popular of the two, though, according to my mind, by far the greater evil. One might very fairly forget the lady countess, even though the carpet-work and its huge machine of a frame were in the room; but I defy you to escape from the sight or sound of madame, even though half a street were between ye. I am not sure whether my aristocratical predilections may not date from that period, together with my other romantic fancies. The female Jack Cade, Mrs. Twoshoes, was enough to cure any mortal of Jacobinism, as the phrase went then. Her cause could not be a good one. That fact came upon us with the certainty of a mathematical demonstration. My lady might not be right; but she must be wrong. That truth was past dispute.

Of this society however, such as it was, I, of course, knew little. I did not even accompany my mother in her morning visits. My walks were confined to rambles on the shore with my maid, or, still more to my delight, with my dear father, the recollection of whose fond indulgence is connected with every pleasure of my childhood. The town lay in the centre of a natural bay, and on the one side the sands went sweeping under cliffs of a tremendous height and blackness, down which a rapid stream came pouring its slender waters like a thread of silver, to an abrupt headland, beyond which the cliff had in some former century given way, and where masses of

earth, huge trees, and even an old mossy orchard, were mingled in most romantic confusion with huge rocks, blackened by exposure, and the gardens, barns, and other buildings of a small farm-house.

On the opposite side of the bay, the coast road, after passing the pier and the harbour, wound under rocks of which large fragments strewed the shore, and which every moment seemed threatening to fall,* to a pretty village about a mile and a half from the town. This was our most common walk. My father, a dabbler in science, with his hammer and basket, breaking off fragments of rock to search for the curious spars and still more singular fossil remains for which the spot is famous, I picking up shells and seaweeds, watching the fishermen as they landed their unhappy hauls, or those semi-aquatic animals, the men-like bathing women, performing their similar though opposite functions, as they immersed the scarcely less unfortunate inmates of their machines in the briny element. What enjoyment it was to feel the pleasant sea-breeze, and see the sun dancing on the waters, and wander as free as the sea-bird over my head beneath those beetling cliffs! Now for a moment losing sight of the dear papa, and now rejoining him with some delicate shell, or brightly coloured seaweed, or imperfect cornua ammonis inquiring into the success of his graver labours, and comparing our discoveries and our treasures. What pleasure, too, to rest at the well-known cottage, the general termination of our walk, where old Simon, the curiosity-monger, picked up a mongrel sort of liveli-

* The part of which the danger seemed most imminent was the churchyard, perhaps one of the most finely situated in England, in spite of its being so perilously undermined.

hood, by selling fossils and petrifactions to one class of visitors, and cakes, and fruit, and cream to another. His scientific bargains were not without suspicion of a little cheatry, as my companion used laughingly to tell him; though, amused by the jargon of the old man, and the composure with which he bore the detection of any small roguery, he suffered himself to be imposed upon in a small way in his own person: but the fruit and curds were honest, as I can well avouch; and the legends of petrified sea-monsters with which they were seasoned, bones of the mammoth, and skeletons of the sea-serpent, have always been amongst the pleasantest of my sea-side recollections.

A MOONLIGHT ADVENTURE.

I AM no lover of moonlight, unpoetical and ignominious as the avowal is; such is the fact, and I confess it frankly. I hate darkness and shadow, and a pallid fitful light, as much as I like distinctness, and brightness, and colour, and therefore love the sun. Give me the day's beauty, and who will may take the night's. I leave the lady moon to those Endymions, the poets. Nay, so far do I carry my distaste to that fair luminary, that half-light, for her half-light I greatly prefer, sitting indoors over the red glowing embers of a wood-fire (the place of all others for a comfortable chat), to shivering in marble colonnades, or trellised arbours, under the fullest moon that ever shone. There is something in that cold, pale, trembling ray that is sure to check conversation. Even those persons who are so far from joining in my opinion that they would swear by their honour that, compared to the moonbeams, the blessed sunshine is naught, are yet unconsciously chilled by their influence, and after exclaiming, How beautiful! have little else to say. The nightingale, to be sure, I must admit the nightingale—but then in spite of Shake-

speare's mistake* on the subject, the matchless song is heard in the general pause of noon (when so many of the common birds are hushed) even more finely than in the silence of midnight—and never, I think, comes on the ear so sweetly as when mingled in some leafy solitude with the tender cooing of the wood-pigeon.

I am no lover of moonlight. Most of my adventures in that way have been of a disastrous sort, whether by land or by water. One fine summer evening, for instance, returning in the captain's boat, gallantly manned by the officers of the ship, from a frigate where we had dined, to the Isle of Wight, where we were residing, the boat was unluckily stranded of St. Helen's, and we were obliged to wait five dismal hours until the tide was so good as to come and take us off, the captain's lady, a peevish, shrewish personage, taking occasion to fret, and fume, and scold the whole time, ringing the changes on all the evils that were likely to befall us, from catching cold to being drowned, until she worked herself up into a fit of hysterical crying, and was effectually quieted by the first lieutenant's throwing a hatful of sea-water in her face. I never shall forget those five hours. Then, again, during the very next summer, being at Southampton, and making an excursion as far as Ryde in a friend's yacht, we had the calamity on our passage back to be becalmed for nearly the same period, just opposite Netley Abbey, and to have on board two musical young ladies, who obligingly offered to beguile the time by the exercise of their

* One almost admits a mistake of Shakespeare's as authority from respect, not only to the great name of the greatest of poets, but his extraordinary accuracy of observation.

accomplishment, and aggravated our misfortune by every variety of scream and squall of which that formidable personage, a singing young lady, is capable. I remember at the time comparing the inflictions, and thinking that the scolding, crying, and sobbing of the stranded boat (to say nothing of the satisfactory conclusion of the sousing) were greatly preferable to the bravuras and duets of the yacht. Besides which, nobody flung literal cold water on the fair singers, though, metaphorically speaking, it was pretty freely administered.

It must be admitted that the winds and the waves were the chief aggressors in these grievances; but there shone the moon bright and cold, laughing, as it seemed, at our distress, and aggravating our sufferings. If it had been dark we might have gone to sleep. But in many a disastrous chance she herself, with her treacherous, fickle light, has been the prime agent. Were we not run away with down the steepest hill in the county, because the dear cream-colour caught a glimpse of the moon shimmering and shivering in the deep pool by Brackham Common? And did not the same lamented steed carry us into the middle of a herd of deer in Talbot Park, because he took fright at the black shadow of an old oak that lay across the road like something real and tangible? And were we not fairly upset into a gravel-pit on Hartley Heath, one snowy Twelfth Night, owing again to those bright, deceitful beams which made the false track seem like the true? Have we not missed our road through thee, false moon, oftener than tongue can tell? Were we not near driving into the long water at Eversley, because we took a pollard for a finger-post, and a holly-bush for a milestone? Dost

thou not make lane look like lane, and cottage like cottage, and wood like wood? And art thou not the only true *ignis fatuus?* Never am I taken in by the treacherous postscript to a country concert bill, "N.B.—There will be a moon." Give me an honest darkness. Then one feels one's way, and finds it.

As, however, there is no rule without its exception, so I must admit that certain pleasant passages of my life have been connected with her Cynthian majesty, one of which is the subject of the present short story.

Several years ago I was on a visit to a distant relation of my mother's, a naval officer, at his beautiful seat in the New Forest. The good admiral, for such was his professional rank, a most hearty and jovial person, had no greater delight than that of assembling "troops of friends" at his hospitable mansion, and his house was, as usual, full of agreeable and well-chosen guests. By far the most striking of his inmates was his orphan ward, Jane Gordon, a rich heiress of high birth and splendid connexions, who, although she had been for some months of age, and in full possession of her large estates in the North of England, still continued to reside with her kind guardian, to whom she looked up with the tender love of a grateful child towards an indulgent parent.

The dear old admiral was, as it seemed to me, the only man whom Jane Gordon was ever likely to regard with either love or reverence. Of a noble and commanding beauty, and a most stately and dignified deportment, she had, it was true, a general and queen-like courtesy and condescension towards all who approached her, but so mingled with a gentle reserve, and a high-bred coldness of manner, that her very polish served to repel familiarity, and to keep the

boldest suitors at a distance. Amongst her female friends, however (and I was fortunate enough to be included in the number), she sometimes relaxed sufficiently to show that her mind was as high-toned and majestic as her person. I have seldom met with anyone who had a wider reach of thought, a purer taste, a warmer heart, or a kinder temper. Her common demeanour was abundantly chilling, but her moments of confidence were enchanting. She resembled those northern springs, where, the moment that the snow melts away, leaves and flowers start up to succeed them.

Of those glimpses of sunshine, however, no gentleman, certainly no young gentleman, was ever permitted to share. Proposal after proposal had been rejected, and her good guardian, who, much as he valued her society, ardently wished to see her married, declared to me one day that he had made up his mind never again to advocate the cause of any of her lovers. "I verily believe," added he, "that the more the girl is courted, the more she sets herself against matrimony. It's the only thing in which she's perverse. But the moment I mention a young fellow to her as likely to make a good husband, from that instant she takes an aversion to him; so that for the future I shall let her have her own way. There's your favourite, now, Charles Elliott, who has been staying here these two months; it's quite clear that he's dying for her; and what a fine noble fellow he is! How full of knowledge, and talent and goodness! What a son, and brother, and friend, he has been all his life! and what a happy woman his wife would be! Yet she takes no more notice of Charles Elliott than of my old crutch! He asked

me yesterday to second his proposals; but I told him frankly that he had my best wishes, but that I was tired of recommending suitors, and should take a special care not to mention his name. I' faith, last time I spoke to her on the subject (it was about Sir Thomas Hanley, some three months ago), she implored me to spare her such discourses, and look upon her as devoted to a single life. Elliott would have as fair a chance of tempting a nun from her cloister as of winning Jane Gordon." And with an air of affectionate vexation the worthy veteran walked away.

It was on the evening succeeding this conversation that Jane Gordon, who had excused herself on the score of indisposition from accompanying the admiral and most of his visitors to dine at the house of a neighbouring nobleman, having besought me to remain and keep her company, beguiled me into taking a moonlight walk into the forest. We were the only persons left at home, for Mr. Elliott had at breakfast-time announced his intention of riding out for the day to visit a harum-scarum friend of his, who was also staying in the neighbourhood; so that Miss Gordon, who had not made her excuses until half-an-hour before the admiral and his party set off for their dinner engagement, felt herself perfectly secure from intrusion and interruption in her ramble. She had been all day silent and languid, far less stately than usual, and somewhat less calm, but infinitely more charming, softer, sweeter, tenderer, more feminine, than I had ever seen her even in her happiest moments. She seemed to be less ill than agitated, and I could not help saying, "Has anything vexed you, Jane? Can I be of any use to you?" And she

hesitated and sighed out "No," while her countenance and manner said most plainly, Yes.

She was not, however, a person to be questioned, even if I had been disposed to force a reluctant confidence; and taking for granted that the worthy old admiral (a professed match-maker) had, in spite of his professions, been worrying her on the score of Charles Elliott, or some other of her lovers, and that her embarrassment and low spirits proceeded from that cause, I followed the bent of her humour and walked with her silently through the grounds into the forest.

The day had been oppressively warm, one of the rare hot days of an English summer, and was succeeded by a fresh and fragrant dewiness, which fell like balm upon the spirits. We wandered on, through brake and brier, threading the intricacies of the beautiful woodland paths, which lay in delicious repose in the bright moonlight, until at last she left the open tracks and edged herself by ways to which she, as an inhabitant, was familiar, through the thick entanglement of underwood, until we reached a very small opening, quite walled in by hawthorn and holly bushes, and shaded by a noble beech, the roots of which formed, she said, her favourite seat. There we sat down, and were falling gradually into a subdued tone of conversation, well suited to the scene and the hour, when all on a sudden we heard the rapid steps and louder talking of men on the other side of the thicket, and immediately recognised the deep mellow tones of Mr. Elliott, and the gay blythe voice of his light-hearted companion, Captain Morland. I was about to propose to join them, or, at least, to call them to join us, in our snug and, whilst we chose to

make it so, undiscoverable retreat, when the strong and agitated compression of Miss Gordon's hand on my arm, whilst she laid the forefinger of her other hand on her lip, restrained me, and kept me an undesigned and unwilling listener to the following conversation, during which she contrived, by the most supplicating gestures, and by the most imploring pressure of my hand, to keep me as entirely and almost breathlessly silent as herself.* I shall put down the dialogue just as we heard it through the impervious leafy wall that alone parted us from the speakers, of whom Captain Morland was for some minutes incomparably the most loquacious.

Mor. What a night, and what scenery! Was ever vapour so soft, so transparent, and so silvery as those small clouds that flit about the moon? And the edges of light which surround the larger and darker masses, how bright and how beautiful are they! Did you ever see a lovelier sky?

Ell. Very lovely.

Mor. Then the effect of the moonbeams on this forest glade! How they sleep on that broad oak, and dance in the tiny rivulet, that wells from amidst the convolved and snaky roots, and goes winding and gurgling along the turf like a thing of life! and how the shining bark of the weeping birch stands out like a stem of silver, whilst the delicate branches, as they flutter in the night breeze, cast a tremulous and

* As this is the third time during this little volume that I have appeared in the very equivocal character of an overhearer, I think it only due to my personal reputation to assure the courteous reader that on all these occasions the occurrence was purely accidental, and that I am as far from being an habitual listener as any she in the world.

glancing shadow on the ground beneath. Is it not beautiful?

Ell. Eh?—Yes; I believe so.

Mor. You believe so!—And see how the holly leaves glitter above the tall fern, which waves around us in such wild profusion—a lower forest! Is it not enchanting? And that deep shadowy perspective, the intricacy, the involution, the mystery, which makes so much of the charm and the character of forest scenery. You don't enjoy it, Elliott! You, whom I have heard declaim for an hour together on a pollard by the side of a pond, or on an elm tree overhanging a rustic bridge, or any such commonplace picturesqueness; and here's a piece of fairyland that sets even such a rattlepate as I am exclaiming, and when one asks you if it be beautiful, you say, I believe so! Only look at that cluster of glow-worms—Elliott, what can you be thinking of? I know that you are in love. But your true lover is ever a lover of nature; basks in the moonshine, and revels in the forest. It is his proper atmosphere. What can you be thinking of?

Ell. Simply, my dear Morland, that however delightful this place may be, it would be still more delightful if one of the fairies you talk of would have the goodness to guide us home again. For, in my humble opinion, we are lost.

Mor. Never fear.

> "I know each glade, and every alley green,
> Dingle and bosky dell——"

By Jove, Elliott, you are right! I thought we had come back to the great oak, from which the avenue branches, which leads us straight to Kinley Lodge.

It's just such a tree. But there is no spring welling out from the roots of the Kinley oak.

Ell. Neither is there any sign of an avenue here. Nor, indeed, as far as I can see, of any path whatsoever. We edged ourselves, if you remember, through one of these thickets. I think that to the left.

Mor. No: this to the right. I think to the right. Never mind. We are lost. Take the matter quietly, man, instead of wandering about in that disconsolate manner, frightening the birds from their nests by beating the bushes, and treading upon the poor, pretty glow-worms, and putting out their lamps. Be peaceable. I shall have the worst of the adventure, inasmuch as I shall certainly get disinherited by my good aunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Morland, for keeping bad hours whilst an inmate of her mansion, or rather for staying out all night (for we shall hardly get back before morning) in, as she will truly assert, bad company; for worse company than you, at present, I think, can hardly be found. If the fair Jane Gordon were to see you in this mood!

Ell. Are you sure, Morland, that you have lost your way?

Mor. Certain. But what need you mind? You have no maiden aunt to look after your false steps—you are a mere guest of the good admiral's—nobody to take care of you, nobody to lecture you, nobody to rave if you sleep out twenty nights; whilst I——

Ell. And you really think that we shan't get home before morning?

Mor. Morning! I rather apprehend that we shall never get home at all. I don't imagine that we shall find our way out; and I doubt if even anyone thinks it worth while to look after us, whether he will find

his way in, though, I take it, the forest is the last wilderness in which we shall be sought for. Mrs. Elizabeth is far more likely to have us cried in the next town, or to advertise us in the London papers, under the head "missing," with our names and marks, like two stray pointers.

Ell. Do, pray, be serious.

Mor. Certainly. It is a most grave subject. Twenty years hence, perhaps, we may turn up in the shape of the remains of two unfortunate gentlemen, who——

Ell. Hark! is that a clock?

Mor. It's an owl, the clock of the forest.

Ell. Morland, I beseech you, leave jesting. If you could but imagine how important it is to me to reach Kinley by a certain time! Can you guess at the hour?

Mor. My repeater will tell us. (*Strikes his watch.*) Half-past ten.

Ell. Gracious heaven! my prospects are ruined for ever! I am a wretch for life! the most miserable of wretches; he who might have been the happiest.

Mor. That tone is too genuine and too passionate to be trifled with. But how, my dear Elliott, can this little difficulty, which must end with the night, affect your happiness?

Ell. You know Jane Gordon?

Mor. Yes! yes! and your passion for her. All the world knows that, and the proud beauty herself included. But she is so nice, and so coy, and so high, and so cold. What of Jane Gordon?

Ell. We are staying, you know, in the same house; and this morning I ventured, for the first time, to put my love for her into words.

Mor. Ay; and she listened?

Ell. Yes; she, the coy, haughty Jane Gordon, listened and blushed, and stood awhile in abashed silence, then turned slowly away; and when I seized her hand and pressed for an answer, faltered that she was going out with her guardian, but should be back by eleven; and then she broke from me. If you had but heard the tone! if you had but seen the blush! if you could image how divinely her unusual softness became her beauty! And to fail her now!

Mor. You shall *not* fail her. I *will* find the way. How in the name of heaven came you to be wandering in the forest on such a night?

Ell. Why, I went to spend the day with you to beguile the hours. And you yourself proposed that we should walk back to Kinley, and promised to be my guide.

Mor. But to trust such a guide as I was likely to prove! And on such an occasion! Never mind, though, my good fellow! I *will* find the way. And depend on it, since Jane Gordon likes you well enough to have made this half appointment, that you'll be the happy man whether you keep it or not. But I'll find the way. I'll be sure to find the way. We must set about now in good earnest. To the right! I am sure to the right.

At this point the voices ceased, and the hasty footsteps gradually receded, and at last totally ceased. We still remained in motionless silence. At last, when quite sure that the gentlemen were fairly out of hearing, Jane could restrain her emotion no longer, but fell on my neck in a passion of tears, sobbing out. "My friend! my own dear friend!"

"Well, dearest?"

"What can you think of me?"

"I think you a wise woman. You could not have made a better choice."

"But my guardian?"

"He'll be enchanted."

"Oh! what will he think of me?"

"He'll be delighted, I tell you."

"And Charles Elliott himself?"

"Nay, you heard what he said on the subject; and if you have a mind to hear what he has to say further, I advise you to make haste home, for they'll certainly be back before us. Come, dearest!"

"Oh! I never can see him this evening."

"But at all events we must get home."

"You'll keep my counsel, then? You promise to keep my counsel?"

"Ay, dearest, as long as it shall be necessary." And she pressed my hand, and we walked home in silence. And I have more than kept my word. For though the parties have been married these half-dozen years, I defy Mrs. Charles Elliott to say that I ever breathed a syllable of our moonlight adventure to man or woman till now, that I whisper it as a profound secret to that most safe and discreet confidant, my singular good friend the public

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